

## Brighton & Hove's Wildlife Forum

Minutes of April 16th 2019 meeting, held 4.50-6-50pm at the Booth Museum of Natural History

### Key actions and summary points

BHWF members present agreed to keep the list of LWS and locations in case they are needed in the future	- Item 2
STHV Group considering next steps regarding representation on latest "rather confusing" site Master Plan	- Item 4
Stanmer Preservation Society- tree clearance just about finished in Stanmer Great Wood-as nesting begins	- Item 6
CPRE Sussex Tree initiative receives grant- Still needs volunteers to help identify streets for City Trees	- Item 6
Longhill Woodland Group made plea to BHWF for help over development plans for Three Houses near LWS	- Item 6/8

**Present:** *Mike Parrott* (MP) F.of Bevendean and Chairman; *John Patmore* (JP) Brighton Greenway; *Maureen Holt* (MH) – notes, & *Colin Leeves* (CL) Keep the Ridge Green; *Hazel McKay* (HM) Save Toads Hole Valley; *Kia Trainor* (KT) CPRE Sussex; *Marcus Oldfield*, TWEACK; *Mary Sansom* (MS) Withdean Park; *Lindy Brook-Tweed* (LB) Stanmer Preservation Society; *Annie Gilbert* (AG) Longhill Woodland Group; *Chris Lowe* (CLO), Friends of Queens Park.

**Apologies:** *Martin Robinson* (MR) Chairman and Benfield WCG; *Dave and Dolly Bell* (DB & DoB) Benfield WCG; *Christine Fitzgerald* (CF) Friends of Waterhall; *James Newmarch*.

**1. Chairman's welcome** to group representatives and introductions. Three new members were welcomed.

**2. Minutes of last meeting** (15-01–19) were approved. **Matters arising** included:

(i) **BHWF Treasurer** (JP) Richard Partridge has kindly offered to be BHWF Treasurer. He has a background in accounting.

His formal appointment will need to be proposed and seconded at the next BHWF Committee Meeting on 16 July.

(ii) **Local Wildlife Sites** (JP): 26<sup>th</sup> March meeting: Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) discussion with Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT). Sites absent from Local Plan, previously agreed at 2013 focus group meetings, will not be added. Proposed new sites will not be added. SWT recommend BHWF contact BHCC directly on this.

John Patmore did formally comment on the City Plan Part 2, with ALL suitable sites recommended. BHWF could follow this up if appropriate.

Only Priority Habitats are being selected for LWS. Withdean Park is most obvious site excluded. Also St Anns Well Gardens and smaller green spaces are excluded, despite these sites being the areas where most local people can experience local wildlife.

**Key Point:** The total resource of sites important for local wildlife is not being recorded. Not being monitored and losses in biodiversity not assessed. Several of those present tonight expressed a wish to look at wildlife records on their site and MS was concerned about Withdean Park and will raise the subject in her group. KT considered BHGSF should be aware. It was agreed BHWF should maintain a list and map of recommended LWSs. This currently exists on [Sites.google.com/view/BHWF](https://sites.google.com/view/BHWF). We hold habitat/species records for many of them too and can keep these updated? In addition BHCC have a duty under the NERC Act 2006 to have regard for biodiversity and should be defending LWSs *against* developers'. The threat to LNRs and LWSs in the City remains substantive.

**3. BHCC Report** – No representative from BHCC attended.

**4. Save Toads Hole Valley Consultation**–(MH/HM) the latest detailed Master Plan produced by developers was proving difficult to fully comprehend. It was supposed to be an outline showing housing density but seems to be suspect as the main site plan appears drawn to a smaller scale than the surrounding area making it difficult to see how 880 dwellings and the high volume of people it generated, could be satisfactorily accommodated in the area shown. We should object to this high number squashed into this congested plan-on the basis they would not fit in! Adding the intended 'greenery' to it would be an impossible task.

Cllr. Vanessa Brown held a THV public meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> January. Publicised around the local area it brought in over 200 local people on the night -to comment on latest proposals. Special regard was paid to changes necessary on King George VI Ave where a 30mph speed limit was proposed to accommodate roads entering from the new estate, so turning it from a major road to a backwater. Those present were openly hostile to the idea.

Water issues -the application indicated the development would not create a flood risk, which is strange given that several supporting documents are devoted to flood risk management!

The LWSs had been included in the plan- but surely this should not have been considered within the main development site at this stage and needs to be disregarded as beyond the current remit? Showing paths here was unnecessary. But the wildlife aspect **must be addressed ASAP** as a **matter of urgency** now or any opportunities will be lost. To date there is NO wildlife access tunnel or bridge proposed across the A27. City Plan part1 stated it wanted to ensure the natural environment was protected and enhanced which is surely also the aim of The Living Coast Biosphere of which BHCC is a lead partner.

A key wildlife corridor at the base of the LWS would become a boundary with the school playing fields –always supposing the idea of a school actually materialises. If not then extra houses should not be placed bordering a LWS for obvious reasons. The corridor for dormice and other wildlife at the eastern end, (adjacent to the triangular site at the roundabout) appears very narrow and unlikely to be attractive to wildlife.

STHV group were contemplating the best response to this application, but maybe at this stage a change of name might be preferable as it was no longer possible to prevent any impending development?

CPRE Sussex, SOS and SWT have already made representations to this latest Masterplan. KT had concentrated on the Landscape impact a development of this size would have on the SDNP. She agreed that nothing seemed able to go ahead at this stage so giving us a little thinking time. The 40% social housing must be properly organised.

BHWF has yet to comment– maybe a joint statement between the Forum and the Campaign? It was suggested a meeting should be arranged between HM, KT and MH to act on this.

**5. Valley Gardens Project** – (JP) 6th March: BH Green Spaces Forum Spring Seminar discussed ‘gardening for wildlife’ (*Prof Dave Goulson*) and ‘bio-diversity in open green spaces’ (*Steve Peters*, Garden Manager for The Level).

Opportunity to integrate biodiversity objectives with the Level/ Valley Gardens scheme were not in place at the initial phase. Option now probably lost for creating wildlife corridor from The Level south to Pavilion Gardens? It appears to concentrate on people issues such as travel and transport.

If anyone is prepared to invest some time into promoting biodiversity objectives here by contributing to BHCC and Project Group meetings please let BHWF know. KT agreed to bring up this topic at BHGSF meetings she attends.

## **6. Local Groups updates – concerns & successes**

**Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group (DoB)** – The footpath at the top of the reserve is now regularly walked by horse riders. Our BHCC Ranger Lindsay Cattanach has visited the stables with a map of the area and hopefully this will be respected by the offenders. The footpath is very narrow in places and is of great concern to all walkers. On Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> June 10.30 pm we have our evening “Glow worm Count” on the reserve, meet outside the Hangleton Manor Pub at 10.30 pm in the evening We have our “Guided Flower Walk/Stroll” identifying the chalk wild flowers on the reserve on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> July meeting at 2pm on the Benfield bridge over the by-pass.

Our next event is the AGM, 7.15 on May 1st & includes a talk by Professor Dawn Scott “*Mammals in an Urban Environment*”; all are welcome-at the Oasis Fellowship Church Hall, Hove, corner of Northease Drive and Hangleton Way. Website: <http://benfieldlnr.tumblr.com/>

**HK Hedgehogs (DB)** - Various events are being undertaken by the group to help educate the public and help Hedgehogs. On the 4<sup>th</sup> May we will be speaking at Patcham Horticultural Society. On 7<sup>th</sup> May at Mayberry Garden Centre 10.30 to 2.30. A two mile guided walk is taking place on 7<sup>th</sup> May to look at Hedgehog habitats starting at Hangleton Manor Pub at 3pm. Finally on the 18<sup>th</sup> May at 2pm, we will be speaking at the AGM of F. of Hollingbury and Burstled Woods at the Dorothy Stringer School. The group is still actively promoting hedgehog welfare, encouraging DVD size holes in fences to encourage access to a larger area, and by encouraging the use of the Footprint Tunnels to prove that Hedgehogs are in your garden.

**Friends of Bevendean Down** – (MP) have now been aided by the farm cattle in clearing remaining hawthorn regrowth from Cardboard Hill. We have also had help from a few more two legged conservationists, which, as we all know is a wonderful boost!

**Friends of Brighton Greenway - (JP)** Workdays held 17<sup>th</sup> February/ 31<sup>st</sup> March. Fence has been restored. Large amount of shrubs esp. hawthorn have been removed, It is unclear why this was done or who authorised it. They are proposing to control thistle growth with a spring mow to ground level. Refer to [www.BrightonGreenway.uk](http://www.BrightonGreenway.uk) for info.

**Friends of Queens Park – (CLO)** Work is well advanced on a new oak viewing platform for the pond where 20 metres of marginal planting beds have also been constructed and planted with appropriate native marginal plants. In addition 100 white water lilies have been planted in protective cages. A pair of Mute Swans has appeared (after a 20 year absence) and is nesting on the Island.

**Swift Conservation – CLO)** The RSPB will again be surveying the city for nesting Swifts for a 3rd year. Efforts to encourage residents to put up nest boxes, particularly in locations where historic colonies have been depleted over the years, are having some success. Ecologist Karolina Roszkowska has been engaging with us at planning application level and on the morning of the meeting she and I had met with representatives of Varndean College who will be installing 8 nest boxes (by Polegate firm ‘birdbrickhouses’)

**Friends of Waterhall – (CF)** have been quiet over the last few months, other than Green Gym spending several volunteer days planting more, and maintaining the other whips that have gone in since early last year. Despite the baking summer the majority survived and made good growth. The dormouse count was very poor for 2018 and this year they will have to wait before nesting, due to the blue tits and wrens that have taken up occupancy and are raising this springs young. The native bluebells, wild garlic and celandine planted last autumn have done very little, maybe the dry soil had some bearing on the situation.

Waterhall is having a long term amphibian/reptile count undertaken by a member of the Sussex Wildlife Trust. The 1<sup>st</sup> results from the reptile check have just come in, 2 adders, 2 slow worms, a common lizard, numerous toads and frogs plus some glow worm larvae; I have some lovely photos. Sadly some of the tins have been damaged as the commercial dog walkers say they don't want snakes encouraged to come near their dog walking paths. A limited area was surveyed when consideration was being given to moving the reptiles and amphibians from Toads Hole Valley to Waterhall.

Sadly off road bikers have discovered the chalk track around our hawthorn wood also the middle path that runs down through the trees, so not only do we have to regularly contend with large numbers of dogs but bikers as well. Such a shame that there is little joy these days in a stroll down to the pond, a rest on a bench and time to watch buzzards as they circle overhead and then fly on up the valley.

**Friends of Withdean Park - (MS)** report that BHCC are taking little interest here now - apart from mowing the grass as the group has Leadership and First Aid training and can work on their own. There are frequently only as few as four members attending the monthly work mornings, but significant work has been undertaken on the lilacs using specialist tree surgeons paid for with the ‘Section 106 money’ from the nursing home development at Carden Avenue - now almost spent. The results have been very encouraging and are a positive step forward.

FoWP would like to attract more members and money as there is much in the park that could benefit and in particular the ponds in the “Pip Shaw Garden”. The ‘Withdog’ group’ have continued to put their focus on maintaining the fence around the Lilac Enclosure and some members may help out with FoWp activities in the months they do not have a work morning (they meet every other month). See [www.withdeanpark.org.uk](http://www.withdeanpark.org.uk).

**Keep the Ridge Green - (MH)** Neil Doyle has now replaced Will Furze as our ranger and although unable to be present at the recent KTRG committee meeting in March, is looking forward to assisting with site management and workdays. This includes attention to bench repairs and long standing issues such as liaising with Alan Griffiths to find a solution to finally eradicate the invasive Polygonum creeper (mile a minute plant) located in the ancient hedgerow- a cause of persistent aggravation for at least 15 years.

Oaks located at the café end of the Green need adequate staking and freeing from invasive blackthorn periodically -a point was raised at the committee meeting to plant up that area with more whips, which when they grow will hide the development at THV! Work in Coney Wood continues to attempt to compensate for the loss of trees due to Ash dieback by strategic placement of new whips.

**Longhill Woodland Group** – (AG) wished to ask BHWF members for advice on the recent approval of three houses on land at rear of Wanderdown Road, gateway to a recognised wildlife corridor. Whilst Michael Gove has declared a ‘biodiversity emergency’ in the UK we are amazed this has been approved as it is the most protected site in Ovingdean, with LWS/ SNCI status and a woodland TPO that covers much of the site.

Planning Application was refused on 6<sup>th</sup> Feb. but subsequently approved a month later after a closed meeting with developers who were allowed to submit more information. We were not allowed to do this. Some of the planning committee sent representatives who had not been present when all the evidence was shown and did not attend the site visit. ORPS and ward councillor Mary Mears have complained to Geoff Raw and a number of our group have contacted him. Developers also threatened to apply for costs from BHCC at the inevitable appeal, which had an influence on the decision.

**CPRE Local Street Tree Project** (KT) were happy to report that £10,000 of funding had been secured from a Lottery Grant and that BHCC were being very supportive as they have no cash available for provision of new trees themselves. The group is hoping to hear from volunteers regarding identification of streets for mapping out where to plant street trees around the city and find locations which would provide the most benefit. Watering would be a big issue and it was hoped to initiate a group of ‘tree champions’ to provide help with this for a time after planting.

**Stanmer Preservation Society**– (LB) Tree cutting – there has been more clearance of valuable habitat at the South end of the park near the Lower Lodges. The work is on hold at the moment as its bird nesting time although apparently all the trees have been felled apart from one. There has also been more shrub and tree clearance by the entrance to the nursery. Work has begun in the walled garden by Plumpton.

*Glysophate* – Tracey Hill, local councillor for Stanmer, supports a ban on Glysophate, none is used in the village.

The Wildflower Conservation Society is waiting to hear if their application for funding has been successful. An area of land has been cleared near the Water Catch where a polytunnel will be erected. Although a little late in the season it is hoped some cuttings/ small plants will be potted up to provide some stock until the project really gets underway.

*Water/flooding*– silt has been removed from the ditch by Limekiln Wood and other soakaways maintained, which has helped with ‘flooding of Stanmer village’ problem. But more needs doing to improve the health of the pond for wildlife.

SPS intend to monitor parts of the village buildings to make sure returning swallows and house martins can gain access to their nesting sites and that these are not blocked.

Sadly there hasn't been much frogspawn and practically no toad spawn in Stanmer ponds, which could be due to disease or very cold weather during the previous spring.

**TWEACK - Withdean and Westdene LNR** (MO) –now part of the community group and nothing much is happening currently over wildlife issues.

**7. Planning**–(i) (JP) Longhill Wood Open Space: Land rear of Wanderdown Road - 3 houses approved, despite LWS nearby.

**8. Any other business.** (i) Paul Steedman (BH Green Party Manager) has asked to meet BHWF. Daytime (especially morning) is preferred. Leader of Green Group of councillors after 2nd May would like to attend.

**9. Date of next General Meeting** - 16th July, start at **4.50pm** and finish at **6.50**. However prior to this there will be a Committee meeting with a 4.30 pm start.

Thanks go to the Booth Museum for kindly providing a venue for the meeting.