

Brighton & Hove Council

Wildlife Advisory Group

Minutes of the Meeting held Tuesday, 19th February 2008
Booth Museum

Present:

Wildlife Advisory Group Members

Colin Leaves (CL)	Keep the Ridge Green
Dave Bangs (DB)	Friends of Whitehawk Hill
Jayne Field (JF)	Natural England
John Patmore (JP)	Botanical Society of the British Isles (Chair)
Martin Robinson (MR)	Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group
Maureen Holt (MH)	Keep the Ridge Green
Paul Crathern (PC)	Council for the Protection of Rural England
Phil Belden (PB)	Brighton Urban Wildlife Group

City Council Representatives

Gerald Legg (GL)	Keeper of Natural History, Booth Museum
Matthew Thomas (MT)	Ecologist (minutes)

I. Apologies

Cath Laing	Sussex Bat Group
Helen Fazakerley	Friends of Preston Park
John Burns	Chairman, Brighton & Hove Allotment Federation

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting (30th October 2007)

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

3. Matters arising from the minutes

Meadow Creation

MT: A total of five sites in east Brighton have been planted with wild flowers this spring as a pilot to test the feasibility of extending wildflower areas throughout the city. The sites are: Tilgate Close (road verge); Eastern Road (central reservation); Craven Road (amenity

grassland); corner of Southover Street & Finsbury Road (amenity grassland); Albion Hill (amenity grassland). MT will report to the WAG later in the year on the results of the pilot.

Supplementary Planning Document

MT: The draft SPD on Nature Conservation and Development is out to consultation until 25th March. A seminar has also been organised for 13th March to look particularly at Annex 6 (dealing with nature conservation and enhancement and developer contributions) to which all WAG members are invited.

Ovingdean Grange Farm

DB & PB: Asked why the land had been sold without wider consultation with the partners of the Downland Initiative. MT to forward WAG comments to the Countryside Team Managers.

4. Cityparks and Open Space Management

PB: Described concerns over open space management and its effects on nature conservation, including use of non-native species in inappropriate places; continuing use of pesticides; damage to habitats due to indiscriminate cutting; lack of liaison with local community groups.

MT: There is now a firm commitment to produce an open space strategy and action plan which will establish clear goals for all to work to. The Sustainability conference in the autumn will also look at green spaces and how these can be better maintained for biodiversity.

The possibility of organising a Member's tour of key sites by local groups was briefly discussed and deferred to the next meeting.

Recommendations

1. Arrange a focus group in May or June to agree key discussion points from the WAG for inclusion in the Sustainability Conference programmed for the autumn.
2. Include elected Member's tour of key sites by local groups on the next WAG agenda.

5. Local Groups Forum

MH: Expressed concern that the LGF seemed to be losing momentum – possibly a reflection of a wider issue with local groups in general? Green Ridge had recruited new members recently but there seemed to be ongoing communication problems with the council that frustrated progress e.g. flailing of the conservation hedge planted by the group

without notice, which had damaged its structure. There is a need to develop a positive working relationship with the council.

In response to questions about the resourcing of the Countryside Team, MT explained that he was not aware of any plans to cut resources. Further details would be reported to the next WAG meeting.

6. Planning application BH2007/03454 FP: Explore Living development, Brighton Marina

JF: Natural England has objected to the development, primarily due to its proximity to the cliffs and the potential need to further stabilise the cliffs as a long-term consequence. Brighton to Newhaven Cliffs SSSI is of international geological interest, particularly the section of raised beach directly behind the Explore Living site.

PB: There is ample information from the recent Black Rock Public Inquiry which could be used to demonstrate the effects of building close to the cliffs.

PB: The Marina planning Masterplan also includes Black Rock and the gasworks – important that local people realise it has a much wider remit than the title suggests.

DB: The Explore Living proposals undermine appreciation of the cliffs, blocking distant views. There will be no 'sense of place'.

After consultation the following representation was agreed for forwarding to the Planning Officer:

"The Wildlife Advisory Group was established by the Council to advise on local nature conservation matters. The group includes local representatives from key nature conservation bodies such as Natural England, Sussex Wildlife Trust and Brighton Urban Wildlife Group as well as local nature conservation groups.

We wish to object to the application because of the impact of the proposals on views of the 'raised beach' immediately to the north of the development site. The fossil beach is unique, of international value (designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest) and certainly the most valued geological feature in Brighton and Hove. The cliffs are a the small surviving fragment of the run of Ice Age cliffs which extended a further mile and a quarter westwards to the Aquarium until the 1830's, when they were cased in by the concrete facings below Marine Parade.

The cliffs are a geological feature at a landscape scale. Any geological feature has an optimum viewing distance. Landscape scale features - like architectural features - need to be appreciated

within an appropriate contextual space, otherwise their meanings are lost.

The Black Rock Ice Age fossil cliff and raised beach can still - at present - be viewed at a longer distance from the supermarket car park. However this application includes tall buildings which, in their bulk, location and height make no reference to their environmentally sensitive surroundings. They would hem in the SSSI and cliffs with a broken wall of tall buildings, blocking viewer's ability to adequately understand this important feature. Such a loss would be analogous to the building of a wall of tall buildings in front of the Royal Pavilion. Only close views would remain, from which it is impossible to appreciate the scale, form and sweeping natural beauty of the raised beach feature. We believe the development would therefore have a severe adverse impact on the nature conservation features of the SSSI, contrary to Policy NC2 of the Local Plan.

The proposal for a parkland area at the base of the cliff represents some acceptance that the present walkway there is unsympathetic to the public's enjoyment and understanding of this landmark feature. However, the proposed landscaped area does not provide mitigation for the threatened loss of the feature's wider visual context, for it relates to a different aspect of the SSSI's interpretive needs.

We are also mindful of the precedent that this proposal would set for any future proposals along the length of the SSSI cliffs. The eastern end of the cliffscape SSSI at Newhaven may face similar proposals at some near future point. The Gaps at Rottingdean and Saltdean, too, may face such pressures in the more distant future.

Thank you for considering our views."

7. Election of Chair and Vice Chair for 2008

After discussion it was agreed to defer election of new Chair and Vice Chair until the next meeting. Nominations should be forwarded to MT in time for then.

8. Meeting dates for 2008

MT: The Council is likely to move to a Cabinet system of decision making in the spring which may affect the Sustainability Commission. Dates for future Commission meetings after April have not yet been published.

It was therefore agreed to defer setting meeting dates for 2008 until the next WAG meeting to ensure co-ordination with Commission dates.

Recommendation

- I. Include WAG 2008/09 meeting programme in the next agenda.

9. AOB

MR: Concerned about an application to hold a large music festival at Devil's Dyke Farm – asked for advice on opposing the application.

JP: Sussex Biological Recorder's Seminar to be held at Hassocks on Saturday 23rd February.

SEEDA may be leading on Shoreham Harbour Area Action Plan which appears to involve major redevelopment. Requested further information to be brought to a future WAG.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at approximately 8.30pm.

Date of next meeting: **6pm, Tuesday 5th May, Booth Museum**