

Brighton & Hove's Wildlife Forum

Minutes of May 23rd 2017 meeting, held 5-7pm at the Booth Museum of Natural History

Key actions and summary points

BHWF members urgently needed to check LWSs for correctness prior to them being used in the City Plan - Items 2 & 8
New open spaces network known as "Brighton & Hove Green Spaces Forum" was voted to be set up in March - Item 3
BHWF formal status going ahead with date of 1st AGM set for June 27th at Booth Museum between 4 & 5pm . - Item 4
Brighton & Hove House Sparrow project - surveying started April/May, 40 volunteers are writing up sightings - Item 5
Stanmer Park –request for more biodiversity information, through preparation of habitat/ideal status maps - Items 7 & 8
Withdean Park -now self sufficient for forthcoming workdays – thanks to DLs volunteer training sessions - Items 3 & 6
TWEACK LNR experiencing great difficulty recruiting new members. Is amalgamation the only way forward? - Item 6
Importance of employing good ecologist by DPS pays off as Meadow Vale houses refused planning permission - Items 6 and 7

Present: Martin Robinson (MR) Chairman, Benfield WCG; John Patmore (JP) Brighton Greenway; Maureen Holt (MH) Keep the Ridge Green - notes; C; Stuart Derwent (SD) Friends of Withdean Park; Mike Parrott, Bevendean Down; Marcus Oldfield (MO) TWEACK; Anne Hyatt (AH) St. Ann's Well Gardens; Chris Lowe (CLo), Friends of Queens Park;

Apologies Dave Larkin, Conservation Manager BHCC, John Cooper – Geologist; Tracie Parker (TP) Deans Preservation Group; Hazel McKay Save THV Community Group; Gill Taylor (GT) Friends of Hollingbury and Burstead Woods; Dave & Dolly Bell (DoB) Benfield WCG; Phil Belden- (PB) SWT; Colin Leeves –KTRG; Christine Fitzgerald (CF) Friends of Waterhall; Bernard Evans (BE), Jane Hawkins- Friends of Sheepcote Valley; Heather Booth (RSPB); Denise Taylor –(DT) VACOS; Corinne Attwood CPRE Brighton; Lindy Brooke Tweed (LBT) Stanmer Preservation Society; Nicola Yuill -interest in Stanmer;

1. Chairman's welcome to all group representatives and introductions.

Membership – No new people had joined this time.

2. Minutes of last meeting (21- 2 -17) were approved. Matters arising included:

JP -Although the need to review LWSs/LGSs being used in the City Plan was raised, there has been no response. The consultation will be very swift and *we should review the sites chosen well in advance*. Send an e-mail to BHWF if you are able to help with this. PB also considers it would be good to find out progress on the Local Plan re the "final" list of LWSs / SNCIs.

3. BHCC Report – In DL's absence there was no direct input from the council. But SD did comment that training extra volunteers to work on site without supervision had been a great help to Withdean Park and David is to be congratulated for the speed at which these courses have appeared.

A green spaces network for this city has been set up –to be known as "Brighton & Hove Green Spaces Forum". The new Open Spaces Strategy has evolved from recent Community University Partnership Programme (CUPP) meetings. Rich Howorth of the Biosphere Project and Cityparks are primary partners and will cooperate with other agencies to promote and encourage groups to prevent ongoing site neglect by providing required guidance and support.

DT writes: "*The creation of an overarching group is now being formalised with a Constitution and a Mission Statement. Development of an online platform to improve communication between groups, promote activities, links to key grants, websites etc. is currently being prepared.*

Partners of the network project are still involved in the 'interim' stages to structure the role of volunteers in the management of green spaces. "

4. Formalising BHWF Status -Approval was sought for the proposed and circulated draft Constitution, by the members present, and a date for the 1st AGM was settled for Tuesday, June 27th at the Booth Museum between 4 and 5 pm. Approval was gained from the Booth Museum for this date and nominations for the new committee are requested to be sent prior to the AGM – which is of course open for all to vote at, if they are so inclined. MR is willing to continue as Chairman if elected; JP has offered to be BHWF Secretary and AH has agreed to become Treasurer (and eventually to locate an auditor). These three posts should be regarded as the quorum necessary for setting up a bank account. MH is prepared to continue as minute taker- if required. After a lengthy discussion it was agreed to keep the committee as simple as possible with potential occasional roles also being co-opted on to the committee -as and when necessary – unless there are any other suggestions or objections. General forum meetings will remain at four per year and are not subject to a quorum, JP to continue as Vice Chairman. MR agreed to amend the constitution again as necessary; JP to put details on website.

5. Brighton and Hove House Sparrow Project (AH) -This current research work has received good public support and appears to be proceeding very well with 40 enthusiastic surveyors having agreed to carry out work– a minimum of 30 individuals are necessary for it to be regarded as a '*scientific and statistically significant*' project. The Sussex Ornithological Society (SOS) will be able to provide funding for this study once a bank account has been set up when it will be possible to claim funds on receipt of paid invoices. There is also a free to enter photographic competition consisting of several categories (schools, children and adults) to be judged later in the year and winning entries will be exhibited at the Booth Museum. Leaflets have been printed and are now available; any ideas for type of prizes welcomed?

***Action:** Who wants to help with this easy survey? Remember there is a House Sparrow Group on the BHWF message board if you wish to join it. <http://s4.zetaboards.com/bhwildlifeforum/topic/30016464/>

6. Local Groups updates – concerns & successes

Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group – (MR, DoB)

Visit our web site on <http://benfieldlnr.tumblr.com/>

The AGM held was held in May and included a talk by Penny Green (ecologist) on "Rewilding the Knepp Estate"

Forthcoming events are: The Guided Flower Walk on Sunday 18th June at 2.30pm, meet over the bridge on the reserve and the late Glow Worm Walk on Saturday 1st July – meet outside Hangleton Manor at 10.30 pm- remember to bring a torch, warm clothes and suitable footwear. All are welcome.

Friends of Bevedean Down – (MP) have had great success with the 'treepoppers' tool for pulling out small elms and hawthorns, it takes longer to pull them out than cut them off but it is then permanent. Brighton Conservation Volunteers spent a day 'popping trees' and made a wonderful job doing more than FBD could achieve in a month! Work days over the summer will concentrate on path clearing and monitoring wildlife.

There is funding for more fencing on the Down and the farmer will then graze cattle in a scrub area –thus saving the group even more work.

Friends of Brighton Greenway - (JP) spring plants are germinating and the first report for this tetrad was sent to SBRC! A Sunday Workday has just been held. It will be useful to share information about sightings and the site more widely.

Future planned work days can be seen on the www.BrightonGreenway.uk website and on the Twitter page.

Preston Park The Rockery Bridge is now dismantled and ready to be rebuilt.

Friends of Sheepcote Valley - (BE) Bernard Evans has taken over group updates of recent events from Lynn Bird. Although their monthly workdays continue, there are less attending - but they have managed to clear up the southern copse and refit a bench at the top of the southern steps. Help with path clearing was forthcoming from Green Gym and Brighton Conservation Volunteers, and a good amount of sheep have worked hard on grass etc. Brambles are still a problem but it is hoped ongoing spring grazing will reduce them- but it may take 4 years or more. The recent rainy week has "fired up" brambles and undergrowth, so some paths are difficult or closed. Tim Squire led a Bird Walk in April while in May the Dew Pond had a cleanup and "dipping" took place. The damaged gate to the enclosure was refitted.

Future Events include: 17th June -repair steps, build bench, and flower survey. 15th July is an extra workday while on Sunday, 16th July a Butterfly Walk is planned.

Friends of St. Ann's Well Gardens (AH) – Our annual spring festival took place on 13th May. The weather was lovely, and lots of people came along. We drummed up some new members and hope to have raised a good amount of money from the event. Hopefully this will be enough to pay for repairs to the fish pond. Another success was getting a grant from the Co-op for environmentally sensitive improvement to the Sensory Garden.

Other groups might be interested to see our Tree and Heritage trails which are now available as a mobile phone app. You can download the TiCL app on App store or Google Play. For more details see <http://www.stannswellgardens.co.uk/trees-in-st-anns-well-gardens>.

Friends of Withdean Park – (SD) Work Mornings were held in March and April with attendance continuing to be very low. The forthcoming May workday will be the first one we will not be required to have a Ranger present as we now

have suitably qualified volunteers to enable FWP to work on their own. This has also enabled us to set work dates through to the end of the year and the group wishes to thank the council for making the necessary courses available.

On Saturday 8th July FWP will be holding a naming ceremony in the park's pond garden which is being called the "**Pip Shaw Garden**". Pip was very much our leader and driving force for many years until her death in August 2014. A tree was planted last year and an engraved boulder is also in place.

Friends of Waterhall – (CF) seventy five hedgerow whips planted earlier this year are doing well. The Green Gym came up in May and the brushwood habitat round the pond was rebuilt – only to be part vandalised already so will now need more attention in June. The heron has returned again -encouraged by tadpoles in the pond and sheep have appeared in the meadow nearby. A recent dormouse check revealed one pregnant female but more boxes were being occupied by blue and great tits and also wrens! One had been completely taken over by black and orange bees? CF has seen a Wall butterfly – probably a first for this area.

Travellers have again been a nuisance despite Waterhall being regarded as a PSPO site – this special notice appears as yet to have made no difference as while the council were thinking about it, another group arrived and occupied a different region. They were really only cleared from the site because of an imminent planned event there.

Deans Preservation Group (TP) – Despite the Planning Officers minding to grant the application and with the odds against us, the Councillors voted 7 to 5 against the development.

We are still awaiting the official reasons to be posted on the planning portal, but ecology was one of the main ones. The ecologist we appointed to carry out surveys last year and critique the assessments of the applicant's ecologist, made a persuasive and compelling three minute speech. The applicant had mapped the Red Star-thistle incorrectly and this was highlighted in a map we produced, overlaying the actual distribution on to the developer's plans. She described that the site should have been designated a LWS in 2013 due to the presence of RST but could not be accessed. The lack of access was confirmed by the County Ecologist. She also put the biodiversity of the site into context, and compared the site to Malling Down which is 22 times the size of Meadow Vale and yet Meadow Vale, with nearly 800 species, has over 40 % of the species number found at Malling Down. We expect the applicant to appeal again *-so the fight continues!*

Keep the Ridge Green – (MH): Dormice - the April box check showed one female weighing 17g had survived winter hibernation and two further dormouse nests were found; in addition various blue and great tit nests with occupants sitting on eggs seen. One or two volunteers have kept recently planted whips in Coney Wood alive through this long dry spell by watering every few days and new hazels were watered daily. Many sightings of Buzzards and Kestrels, with multiple numbers of sparrows around the Mill. Ranger Will Furze advised work on long awaited water trough pipeline is imminent. However the group will need to find money for repairing several benches which badly need attention.

Fly tipping of garden rubbish- a resident backing on the Green employed three Irishmen (not a genuine tree company) to cut down his neighbours overhanging trees, a matter not discussed with the neighbour concerned. Later vast amounts of tree boughs/cuttings were discovered strewn behind two gardens along the hedgerow - flattening it in places, newly put in whips also affected but survived. Will Furze stated if reputable tree surgeons are not employed then this becomes the responsibility of whoever employs them to clear up and a letter from the council enforcement team will be sent.

The Annual Butterfly walk- to start at the Dyke Road/café end, is to be led by Jamie Burston from Butterfly Conservation, and planned for Sunday morning, July 30th, 10.30-12.30. All are welcome.

Save Toads Hole Valley (HM) – the public consultation - extended to May 4th is now closed, so planners are working on the final Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to be presented to council's Economic Development & Culture Committee in June. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was out for consultation at the same time. It is hoped notice is soon taken to provide some protection for the SSSI slope?

Stanmer Preservation Society (LBT) Memorial Trees –no update on information already received over trees (unless permission obtained for removal); the Dawn Redwood by pond and Tulip tree will be saved. Permission is being requested to create a **Sanctuary** to support wildlife where people/dog walkers/ mountain bikers can't go, since footfall will increase with more visitors to the park. Bats – since the stable block conversion there have been far less bat sightings in the park. LBT is contacting SWT to request a survey to find out where they are presently living and to make sure they're protected during any future changes.

Ranger Will Furze reports: 20 gates across the estate access land are currently being replaced. BHCC has also installed a 15m concreted pathway from Upper Lodges Wood out on to the access land near the Ditchling Road. This was done to mitigate some of the problems caused by heavy cattle use which has made it hard to navigate by disabled users etc. Last year he got quotes to do vegetation clearance and dredging work around the pond but at that time there were insufficient funds to go ahead so it will be looked at again this year. Re-establishing some dormouse monitoring in and around the Great Wood is planned so boxes need purchasing, see : <http://www.mondaygroup.org> /together with finding a licensed handler to carry out the monitoring.

TWEACK - Withdean and Westdene LNR (MW) and (MO)

The group continued with their regular workdays led by Neil Doyle. The last two (April and May) involved step repair/replacement work on the higher path in Withdean Stadium Woods. The group is still experiencing very low membership and gets very limited support on workdays. More seriously there are **no** new members willing to join the committee to help organize events and activities. Martin Wilson (CHAIRMAN since 1993) and Lili Wilson (Secretary since 1997) are retiring on 5th June; Marcus Oldfield and Mike Letton will then be the only committee members remaining. Unless there are new volunteers for the committee TWEACK will need to be restructured. Hopefully this will involve some form of ‘amalgamation’ with the recently-established Friends of Westdene Green (FOWG) in order to provide a viable number of volunteers for the area. These matters will be discussed at the Barn AGM, Westdene Green at 10.00 am, Monday 5 June.

Neil Doyle will continue as ranger in the Woods and Huw Morgan (SWT) does plan to provide some assistance on a regular basis for the LNR and the Stadium section (part owned by SWT) of the reserve.

7. Planning:—a) (JP) - Stanmer Park Restoration Project: This is primarily a historical restoration, but very little input has been received on biodiversity. **31st March Meeting** held with Paul Campbell by MR and JMP; MR commented that Paul Campbell seemed very enthusiastic to get on with the practical work involved for long term habitat improvements. He was keen to maintain veteran trees and for lichen studies to be carried out. Refer to ‘Stanmer Consultation’ on Discussion Board for notes.

Preparation of ‘Habitat Maps’ for Stanmer Park (JP)- we can build on Phase 1 maps and improve accuracy for CURRENT habitats in Stanmer Park, extending beyond the boundaries onto the Downs.

Secondly, we can map suggestions for biodiversity improvements; habitat connections; hedgerows; species-rich grassland and ponds. The PARKLAND habitat is the most important feature to enhance.

Basic help will be needed for checking habitats on the ground, providing boundaries and indicating where wildlife features are located.

b) (JP) - **Planning Permission was refused** for houses at Meadow Vale pLWS. Biodiversity objections played large part in this refusal; TP has published details on ‘Save Our Deans’ website.

c) (SD) - The 12 Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) agreed by the Council were finally implemented from 1st April. It is probably best to limit our comments at present to procedures ***not having settled down so far!*** There have been and remain many encampments of squatters throughout the town, but the Transit Site is exclusively for the use of gypsies and Irish travellers.

8. Local Site Monitoring-2017 – JP -it will be useful to assess the condition that local wildlife sites are in. For list of sites and suggested months to visit; refer to ‘Local Site Monitoring - Habitats’ on the BHWF Discussion Board. Downloadable instructions and the recording form, is on this page too. List of sites still needing monitoring has been provided, with recommended months for optimum time to visit.

9. Any other business. MR – as part of the May’17 Brighton Festival, bird watching took on a different guise with ‘For the Birds’, an environmentally unfriendly event staged by an artistic group using lights and noise showing birds in WildPark/ Hollingbury to around 50 people for 3 hours each evening -costing £12 each. The RSPB were aware but may not have realised the implications at this sensitive (nesting season) time. Every effort should be made to see it does not happen again next year.

10. Dates of next general meetings- 5-7pm on Tuesdays 15th August & 14th November

Date of first AGM meeting - Tuesday, June 27th at the Booth Museum – between 4 and 5 pm.

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

