

Brighton & Hove's Wildlife Forum

Minutes of January 15th 2019 meeting, held 4.50-6-50pm at the Booth Museum of Natural History

Key actions and summary points

- Save Whitehawk Hill Campaign galvanised into urgent action to stop erection of Five Tower Blocks on LNR - Item 3
- A final check on LWS list and locations is needed. Some sites are still absent - Item 4
- House Sparrows Project to continue with new volunteers as unfortunately Anne Hyatt is relocating to Scotland - Item 5
- Stanmer Preservation Society horrified by BHCCs industrial scale woodland clearance in Stanmer Great Wood.
- Protected species have been put at risk - item 6
- CPRE Sussex Tree initiative calls for wildlife volunteers to help identify streets for City Trees in Btn & Hove - Item 6
- Representation from Longhill Group came to BHWF for first time to object to development plans for Coldean- Item 6/8
- Save Toads Hole Valley in race against time to make representation on latest site Master Plan after consultation - Item 7

Present: *Martin Robinson* (MR) Chairman, Benfield WCG; *John Patmore* (JP) Brighton Greenway; *Maureen Holt* (MH) – notes, & *Colin Leeves* (CL) Keep the Ridge Green; *Anne Hyatt* (AH) St. Ann's Well Gardens, *Hazel McKay* (HM) Save Toads Hole Valley; *Kia Trainor* (KT) CPRE Sussex; *Jess Price* (JPr) SWT; *Marcus Oldfield*, TWEACK; *Sue Craske* (SCK) Withdean Park; *Sue Craig* (SCg) Stanmer Preservation Society; *Dave Bangs* (DB) *Kim Turner & Penny Smith* (PS) F.of Whitehawk Hill; *Cliff Munn* (CM) BHGSF; *Brian Thompson & Annie Gilbert* (AG) Longhill Woodland Group; *Jane Hawkins* F.of Sheeppcote Valley

Apologies: *Mike Parrott* (MP) F.of Bevendean; *John Cooper* (JC) Sussex Geodiversity Partnership; *Dave and Dolly Bell* Benfield WCG; *Phil Belden*- SWT; *Steve Savage*- Ecologist; *Chris Lowe* (CLo), Friends of Queens Park.

1. Chairman's welcome to group representatives and introductions. BHCC did not send a representative. No apologies received from officers who normally attend.

2. Minutes of last meeting (16-10-18) were approved. **Matters arising** included: (i) (JP) - Discussion Board has been removed from webpage as now run by TapaTalk. Their terms & conditions are less favourable than previously so recommended we do not sign-up with them.

3. Save Whitehawk Hill Campaign – (DB) enlightened us of this council's proposal to build five tower blocks and set a dangerous precedent to develop Whitehawk Hill, showing complete disregard for a designated Local Nature Reserve **#SaveWhitehawkHill** This is despite BHCCs own website recognising it as very important ancient chalk grassland and a precious greenspace of huge value to the local community! The Homes for Brighton and Hove Partnership have proposed the venture which both CPRE Sussex and SWT regard as being completely unacceptable and it is a matter of urgency now to get it stopped – protest meetings are ongoing and there is one before the whole council, 4.30 pm on 31st Jan. @ Hove Town Hall. There is also a need to produce a joint statement between the Forum and the Campaign. Providing much needed affordable housing should not be done at the expense of destroying one of the City's valued wildlife and recreation areas. City Plan part1 stated it wanted to ensure the natural environment was protected and enhanced but development here would conflict with the aims of The Living Coast Biosphere of which BHCC is a lead partner. 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 other LNRs and LWSs in the City is substantive.

Refer to: <https://www.hyde-housing.co.uk/media/4108/whitehawk-consultation-boards.pdf>

4. Local Wildlife Sites (JP): Can we agree the list and locations? Boundaries should be fairly accurate now. We next need to ensure that Sussex Wildlife Trust is including these sites, as a minimum, * **meeting to be arranged**. Most sites were agreed at 2013 Focus Group meetings. 127 due to be included, 17 have been rejected now. Link is on...

[Sites.google.com/view/BHWF](https://sites.google.com/view/BHWF) Decisions are needed for: -

- Bear Road Cemeteries – *only southern side included. More at top of Bear Road Hill, to North, should these be in?*
- Cliff Road Paddock and Cliff Corner swapped over! *Cliff Rd Paddock has large Aut. Ladies Tresses Spiranthus spiralis population.*
- Deep Bottom & The Chattri – *Deep Bottom seems to be missing.*
- Ditchling Road / Hollingbury - *Area sites (currently Wild Park LNR only) Potentially land will be missed out.*
- High Hill Down - *??? interest features unknown. Near Ovingdean. Overlaps with Balsdean Downland West?*
- Heath Hill Down, Bevendean - *??? interest features unknown. Probably mixed up with High Hill Down (!). Appears to lie within Bevendean Down LNR.*
- Hove Park /Goldstone Reservoir, and Engineerium Grounds. *Recommend be included.*
- Hogstrough Bottom *(was 2 sites, in Downs NP)*
- Meadow Vale Paddocks
- Roedean School Bank and Ovingdean Hall are confused. *Recommend both be included.*
- Stanmer Park has five sub-units – *North compartment should include all seminatural woodland (c. 1 acre extra recommended)*

· Copse at Woodingdean Cemetery – *Removed*, as is Scrub East of Woodingdean, and Roundhill Copse- *both removed*

New Sites

· Hove Lagoon -*large house sparrows colony*

· Park Crescent - The Level - Valley Gardens, Brighton - Pavilion Gardens = *habitat corridor*

· St Ann's Wells Gardens - *important for breeding birds and local access to wildlife in Hove*

· Vale Park (Aldrington) has range of natural habitats in an otherwise neglected mainly urban landscape. *Awaiting details from Friends of Vale Park'*

· Wanderdown Road Open Space

· Wish Park (West Hove)

· Withdean Park – *Top Priority, include **entire** Park -which includes ponds, flower-rich meadows, hedges and mature trees supporting lichen and bryophyte assemblages.*

It was agreed between Jess and JP that these had been massively neglected over recent years and a significant number of those first designated in the 1990s had not been looked at since. The council should be paying far more attention to biodiversity issues on LWSs rather than regarding them as earmarked for potential development. Many sites on the Urban Fringe are really countryside and act as the people's Downland.

Dan Watkins, LWS officer at SWT, considers some 2013 LWS decisions still need assessment and await a future review but funding from BHCC needs to be forthcoming for these to be done quickly. Important to complete prior to the publication of City Plan part two. See :-

<https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/planning/planning-policy/city-plan-part-two>

JPr (SWT) sent a spreadsheet of B&H LWS to BHWF. The SxBRC have taken a list provided by John Patmore and compared it with decisions in the two LWS review reports (BHCC and SDNPA). In summary, of the 125 grid reference points provided by JP: -

- 94 have been put forward in the Brighton and Hove City Plan Part 2 and the South Downs National Park Local Plan as local wildlife sites. These listed as '*Designated Local Wildlife Sites*'.
- Seven were not designated as they were already '*Designated Local Nature Reserves*'.
- Seven sites were deemed to have insufficient evidence to designate but enough potential to be considered for future survey. These are listed in the excel sheet as '*Candidate Sites*' (also in city plan part 2).
- Six sites have no or insufficient evidence to designate during the review and were not of sufficient interest to be candidate sites. These are listed in the excel sheet as '*Failed Criteria Sites*'.

11 sites were not surveyed as part of the 2012 review and no information was passed on to the 2017 review. It might be that these sites were recommended at the 2012 panel meetings, but no minutes exist to cross-reference and there is no information in the SxBRC's records that these were ever considered as LWSs so listed as '*Sites with no information*'.

BHWF is to send additional survey details to SWT. It is regrettable that members of the LWS Review Committee have not made more effort to obtain the additional information over the past five years. Local Groups and amateur naturalists could have supplied this data for minimal cost.

5. Brighton and Hove's House Sparrows Project (AH) -This autumn we have been having fun with various schools, youth organisations and community groups building sparrow nest boxes. Also big thanks to Hannah our new photography volunteer (<http://www.hannahrowsell.com>). These events are tremendously important with helping young people to engage with nature and of course helping our local house sparrows. If you know of a community group or school who might like to take part, please let us know.

Click for Nest Box Building details: <https://sites.google.com/site/bhsparrowsproject/events>. Our "*House Sparrows and Cats*" leaflet, a collaborative project in conjunction with Cats Protection League is available, either download from website or email BHsparrows@gmail.com. See [Distribution Map](#) -shows all sites across the whole city where house sparrows reported. The area around Withdean stadium is of some concern.

No surveys are planned for 2019, but it will continue with other initiatives. Unfortunately Anne Hyatt is relocating to Scotland, but has hopefully secured two responsible volunteers to take over the organisation from her. Additionally, a colour ringing project is planned (thanks to Richard Black). Further information will be available once plans have been agreed in January. Data was passed to Sussex Ornithological Society (www.sos.org.uk) and then to BTO Birdtrack database and various national records. See Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/bhsparrows>

Twitter https://twitter.com/@BH_Sparrows

MR repeated his congratulations to AH for her excellent hard work which has made this project such a great success.

6. Local Groups updates – concerns & successes

Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group (DoB) –

The footpath at the top of the reserve is regularly walked by horse riders; our Ranger Lindsay Cattanach has visited the stables with a map of the area so hopefully this will now be respected by the offenders. The footpath is very narrow in places and is of great concern to all walkers. The Conservation flock have now arrived on the East side of the hill and we are still busy clearing overgrown bramble and scrub during our regular weekly Tuesday sessions on the hillside. 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/>

Friends of Bevendean Down – (MP) held their annual bonfire lunch in December at the Knepp Close site, unfortunately we only get there at this time of year so the site showed it! We had to clear a way through brambles to get to the fire site but jacket spuds, beans and sausages were soon readily consumed! Next workday will be back to work!

Friends of Brighton Greenway - (JP) held first Workday of 2019 on 13th January. Fence needs restoring. Late March cut planned for flower meadow to reduce thistle *Cirsium* spp. strength. Refer to www.BrightonGreenway.uk for info.

Friends of St. Ann's Well Gardens – (AH) will be running two RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch sessions on 26th and 27th January, otherwise little to report at present. Unfortunately for BHWF, Anne will be moving north imminently.

Friends of Withdean Park - (SCK) held an AGM in early December, with a slideshow and announcement of the photography competition. Unfortunately this was very poorly attended. Stuart Derwent (treasurer and membership secretary) was given a lilac as a thank you and leaving present. Sam Thompson has been clearing and removing dead Lilacs in a number of beds. Dead wood has been mulched and stored on site for later use.

The last work morning in 2018 was attended by seven members and friends and set about the Lilac beds again. Using our very own mulch we spread it out on one of the Lilac beds. Another bed received a partial dig over to remove grass and weeds. We also planted three new Lilac trees into beds that had suffered from the removal of dead trees. Funds totalling about £8,000 were allocated to the Lilac collection from the developers of the nursing home at the bottom of Carden Avenue.

Our next work morning will be on Sunday 27th January - we can always do with more help please.

www.withdeanpark.org.uk.

Keep the Ridge Green - (MH) at an October workday more attention was paid to staking well grown oaks near the café where invasive blackthorn was cleared previously leaving them vulnerable to windy conditions. In a different area our ranger assisted volunteers with removal of unwanted vegetation to facilitate access to the wood. Green Gym again assisted in December by planting the 100 native tree whips kindly supplied by Christine Fitzgerald.

Will Furze and Alan Griffiths are hopefully still working on a solution regarding control of the invasive *Polygonum* creeper (mile a minute plant) located in the ancient hedgerow.

Longhill Woodland Group – (AG) Two representatives came to ask people to support their concern (see also under Item 8 – Planning) over development proposals at Coldean Woods.

CPRE Local Street Tree Project (KT) had been formed by CPRE Sussex. Initiated last year, various meetings have taken place and it is hoped to generate interest by local people/ all members of the public into planting and maintaining street trees around the city. Next step will be to secure funding. The Government document setting out new proposals (see also Item 8) provided good ideas. BHWF members could consider extending the concept to include trees on open greenspace and to assist in identifying key locations for mapping where trees would provide the most benefit.

Stanmer Preservation Society– (SCg) informed of the *really heavy handed* tree clearances just witnessed causing devastation in three woods (Water Catch, Flint Heap and Upper Lodges) and putting delicate habitats in jeopardy. Although last year SPS had agreed, through the management plan, to *some* clearing to help biodiversity, they explained the felling licence did not allow for such heavy machinery and were currently liaising with Fiona Le Garsmeur, BHCC Parks Project Manager regarding the matter. JPr explained Ash trees in Sussex were dying much quicker than expected so heavy machinery was often needed to protect workers from trees falling the wrong way, but SPS said according to John Gapper this reason was not the case here. Work will be starting in the walled Garden next week.

Sussex Geodiversity Partnership (JC) had applied to the Rampion Fund for a £9,000 grant to develop their work –this had unfortunately been turned down but they intend to reapply –so better luck next time. See their website <http://geodiversitysussex.org.uk>

TWEACK - Withdean and Westdene LNR (MO) – had attempted to join with the much larger community group '*Friends of Westdene Green*', but needed to change its constitution. Only MO and Mike Letton were left as interested members of the original team but due to health issues had been unable to work in the Stadium Woods so currently wildlife issues were not being addressed. Neil Doyle was doing whatever maintenance he could on steps etc.

7. Save Toads Hole Valley Consultation–(HM) copies of the latest detailed Master Plan map were distributed- which had been produced by developers who talk glibly about housing density but there seemed to be no evidence to show it worked. A consultation had been open over Christmas until 7th Jan. but the group had not been informed. However having been assured by Cllr. Vanessa Brown that this was not actually a deadline for observations, meetings were being arranged to examine this plan further, with special regard to the LWS and there seemed little room left for greenery in the main site. The first was a public meeting arranged by Cllr. Brown for Thursday, 24th January at 7pm @ Aldrington School, Eridge Road Hove, BN3 7QD –near Waitrose. STHV group will then meet as soon as practicable afterwards to discuss how best to respond to this application. HM notes among other topics:-

This plan appears to have been drawn to a **smaller scale** than the surrounding area. If permission is granted for this application, consent will exist for 880 dwellings (and 25,000 sq.m. of B1) without any evidence that 880 units (25,000 sq.m.) can be satisfactorily accommodated on the site?

The application form indicates that the development would not create a flood risk, which is strange given that several supporting documents are devoted to flood risk management.

The flora on the SNCI is assessed as '*primarily covered in more mature scrubs, although a small area of mature woodland is also present on the northern portion of the SNCI.*' Proposals for the SNCI would '*restore the area to chalk grassland, scrub and woodland mosaic for the benefit of dormice reptiles, invertebrates, bats and birds*'; a key wildlife corridor at the bottom of the SNCI would become a boundary with the school playing fields and school - is that what the BHWF would support? However, the proposed school playing fields would inevitably have floodlights, which would disturb wildlife during the autumn?

Assessment of the flora on the site excluding the SNCI is as follows: '*The site is covered in its entirety by a mixture of dense and scattered scrubs and rough grassland. The vegetation has been assessed to be of low botanical value.*' This assessment means the whole lot can be grubbed out!! **NO wildlife access tunnel or bridge is proposed across the A27**, despite submitted drawings showing the close proximity of the NW end of the Toads Hole Valley SNCI to the Brighton and Hove Golf course SNCI.

There's a dormouse crossing near the top of King George VI Ave, which has to be a good thing, if the dormice can find it! A corridor for dormice and other wildlife at the eastern end of the site, (adjacent to the neighbouring triangular site at the roundabout) appears to be very narrow and unlikely to be attractive to wildlife.

The proposed vehicle access arrangements appear to make a small incursion into the SNCI, near Goldstone Crescent; the extent of the incursion is probably the minimum that was likely to be proposed. Part of the hedgerow between King George VI Road and KGVI Drive will be removed for bus access and site lines.

Office space is now shown at the bottom of the SNCI tucked against the A27, so is only likely to attract low value uses and will more probably be used for warehousing/distribution; those uses may though be more hospitable for wildlife than residential uses.

(.JP) BHWF have yet to finally comment on THV plans –and should try to co-ordinate with SWT.

8. Planning–(i) (JP) Coldean Woods BH2018/03541 Erection of 2 no seven storey buildings and 4 no six storey buildings (including lift overruns) to provide 250 no residential dwellings (C3), 162 car parking spaces, 365 cycle parking spaces; new access from Coldean Lane. Close to Wild Park LNR.

(ii) (JP) Government Consultation on Protecting and Enhancing England's Trees and Woodlands. Deadline: 28th February 2019. This consultation is on Government proposals to introduce four new measures on the process of felling street trees and to strengthen the Forestry Commission's power to tackle illegal tree felling. Also proposed is best practice guidance to support local authorities in drawing up, consulting on and publishing a Tree and Woodland Strategy.

The fourth proposal is to give the Forestry Commission more powers to tackle illegal tree felling and to strengthen protection of wooded landscapes. You can send a response in confidence, or by registering on the Forestry Commission database for future updates. These links are all given at:

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/forestry/protecting-trees-and-woodlands/>

9. Any other business. (i) At the Committee Meeting a Chairman and General Secretary were appointed. BHWF still seeks a TREASURER urgently. If you are able to provide a few hours each month on helping with this please contact us. No special knowledge is required.

(ii) DB brought copies of his new book '**The Land of the Brighton Line**' with him. This field guide to the middle Sussex and Surrey Weald cost £25 or £20 direct from DB and is excellent value.

(iii) HM flagged up endangered front/back gardens (respectively by cars/development) as being of great concern. Disastrous to important wildlife and us! CL stated since the severe shrub 'hedge' pruning along seafront by BHCC, more evidence of severe hedge cutting noted around the city – e.g.- at St.Nicholas Churchyard. One consideration is that the 'Pay Back team' are involved with this work and may not have been given enough supervision?

10. Date of next General Meetings - Tuesdays, 16th April and 16th July, start at **4.50pm** and finish at **6.50**. However prior to the July meeting 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.