

## Brighton & Hove's Wildlife Forum

Minutes: 18<sup>th</sup> October 2011 meeting at the Booth Museum

### Key actions and summary points for the CSP

Guest Laurie Jackson (SWT) explained the importance of Biodiversity and LBAPs.	- Item 3
Concern about BHCC consultation process & calls for input to Draft Local Biodiversity Action Plan by BHWF members.	- Item 3/5
BWG and HBW have both had their notice boards vandalised.	- Item 4
KTRG and HBW experiencing difficulties with cyclists in woods.	- Item 4
City Plan consultation.	- Item 6
Toads Hole Valley - Greenfield site plans.	- Item 6
<b>Very many thanks go to Gerald Legg</b> for the years he has provided LCWGs with a venue at the Booth Museum for meetings, and to Lee Ismail for agreeing to continue - AOB	

**Present:** Martin Robinson(MR)-chairman, & Dave Bell (DB), Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group; Maureen Holt(MH) –notes, & Colin Leeves(CL), Keep the Ridge Green; Stuart Derwent (SD) Friends of Withdean Park & chairman of CPRE Brighton; Phil Belden, Brighton Urban Wildlife Group; Dave Alderton, Wild Park; John Patmore, Eco-Logically and Friends of Preston Park ; Gill Taylor(GT), Hollingbury & Burstead Woods; Gerald Legg (GL) Keeper of Natural History, Booth Museum- host  
Laurie Jackson (LJ) Sussex Wildlife Trust / Sussex Biodiversity Partnership-guest

**Apologies:** Christine Fitzgerald (CF), Friends of Waterhall ; Roger Carter(RC), Butterfly Conservation; Pru Gridley(PG), Stanmer Preservation Society; Martin Wilson(MW), TWEAK-Withdean & Westdene Woods; Tessa Pawsey (TP )& Mike Parrot, Friends of Bevendean Down; Lynn Bird (LB) & Bernard Evans (BE), Friends of Sheepcote Valley.

- 1. Chairman's introduction** of group representatives and welcome to our guest, Laurie Jackson.
- 2. Minutes of last meeting** (5-7-11) were approved after PB inquired if there had been any news of the hospital materials handling scheme (consolidation site) at Sheepcote Valley. CL said he might be in a position to find out.
- 3. Local BAP, engagement and consultation.**

LJ gave an enlightening talk on the background to Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs), prior to informing us further on this topic by providing information on Sussex BAP and Biodiversity strategy. She confirmed BHCC are definitely contributors, with Matthew Thomas a part of the steering committee. A review in 2007 added quite a lot of priority species (1,149 –including many moths). New plans no longer focus on species action plans but concentrate on including that knowledge into habitats. There are 75 biodiversity opportunity areas across Sussex, five of which are located in Brighton & Hove.

The recent Government 'Natural Environment White Paper' sets out how they can improve care for nature. UK BAPs are considered to be the best way of looking after nature through identification of species and their habitats. Biodiversity 2020 is the most recent strategy to attempt to set some sort of realistic timescale for combining politics and best practice in setting BAP objectives and targets. A 3-page summary of the key points for BHWF members has been published on-line condensing the 80 page England Biodiversity Strategy

What can we expect from Brighton & Hove? – To conduct an audit of what we have regarding species and habitats – e.g. vegetative shingle (quite an obligation to fulfil). JP considers BHCC consultations are opaque and more transparency is required. The draft Local BAP plan only appeared on the website following pressure to do so. It is believed that the BHCC consultation period will be 12 /16 weeks. Local groups need the power to assist in ensuring the work is carried out properly.

Dividing up the work in response to the draft LBAP needs people to look into necessary details on specific habitats and species. Community engagement is essential to developing a LBAP from the

beginning, but JP is of the opinion the council are merely involved in this as an exercise and is concerned about adequate inclusion of BHWF views in progressing the draft LBAP objectives forward, especially as local groups will be undertaking the actual site monitoring and management work in the future. The application to UNESCO for Biosphere status seems to have taken priority over producing a LBAP. For example the advert for the Biosphere Officer appeared to be more about raising the council's profile to "...create an International reputation for a high quality of life." The terms 'Biodiversity' and 'BAP' were both absent! PB was confident Richard Howarth would be a great asset and GL confirmed he had an interest in marine sites. At some point the LBAP will appear linked to the Biosphere Reserve application but this may not be until September 2013. Meanwhile we should ensure habitat and species objectives and targets in the LBAP reflect the Sussex BAP and UKBAP guidance. ACTION: JP to represent BHWF in discussion with Sussex Wildlife Trust (via LJ) to ensure LBAP is produced to an adequate quality standard. Urban fringe open space areas probably make up 20% of Brighton & Hove. JP intends to keep in touch with LJ.

#### **4. Local Groups – updates - concerns & successes.**

##### **Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group (MR & DB)**

The polycarbonate Interpretation Board window, by the by-pass, was vandalised, but we understand it will soon be repaired. The bridge over the by-pass is slightly restricted at the moment as it is being repainted.

A meeting was held on-site with our new ranger Will Furze to discuss management for the winter season. The overdue grazing has not yet started due to lack of electric fencing. However sheep are scheduled to come on to the reserve in October/ November. The water bowser which has been used in the past has been removed so will not be available at present. (PB noted there was a bowser currently with the sheep at Sheepcote). Also new fencing has been erected to the western boundary with Will, in liaison with the SDNPA. Scrub clearing is now under way. The first two work days cleared bramble and shrubs between Badgers Way and Benfield farm, in order to replace old fencing with a stock proof type, and is to be paid for from the BHCC HLS grant.

A most interesting October talk was on 'A History of Saddlescombe Farm' and the speaker, Charlie Cain, brought along a selection of old farm items including a wagon wheel to show everyone.

##### **Friends of Hollingbury & Burstead Woods (GT)**

H & BWs have continued with regular monthly work sessions which have attracted new volunteers – recent work includes: hedge and tree planting, glade clearance, planting of wild flowers, step and path creation/maintenance and litter/rubbish clearance.

In the National Park piece of woodland, 500 bluebell bulbs given by another conservation group with the assurance they were native as supplied through BHCC, to their dismay were found, when they flowered, to be definitely *not* native. These can outcompete local native species so they do not know what to do about them! The group has recently had to spend £600 on repairs to information boards – some for maintenance reasons but others because of vandalism!

They have had a pitch at three local fayres this summer: North Laine Community, Dorothy Stringer Environmental school fayre, and the Hollingbury Park Avenue street party. Also, for the third year running, went into Downs Junior School where they taught 60, Year 5 children about the importance of trees through fun woodland activities, and followed this up with a field trip to Hollingbury woods. Both children and teachers were appreciative of these efforts and next year they will try something similar with Hertford Juniors. There was however one incident when a load of adult cyclists raced through the woods where the children were working on their leaf ID sheets. It was very lucky no-one was hurt! The Management Plan draft is with Hugo Blomfield for his observations before it goes out to public consultation, but further work is still required on the flora and fauna surveys.

Comment from PB reassured Gill not to worry too much about details in the management plan so long as community engagement over ideas for main compartment management (such as what to do about site trees / meadow / hedgerows / dead wood etc) could be agreed on; any gaps (eg species info) could be noted in the Plan as work needing to be done in future.

##### **Friends of Withdean Park (SD)**

FWP petitioned the council for a share of a gardener for two or three days a month without success. The only current regular activity by the council is grass cutting and statements made at the meeting suggested misunderstandings within BHCC on what actually happens. This is being pursued.

Their recent work mornings have concentrated on removing brambles, ivy and tree saplings – mostly sycamore and elder – from the lilac beds. Weeding by the volunteers has also been carried out on some beds following the council's strimming and use of weedkiller earlier in the summer. The council has recently repeated the use of weedkiller in unfavourable – windy – conditions ignoring requests to not do so!

A group of 'travellers' – the fifth in 2011 – entered the park in late August. BHCC has started the formation of a mound and trench defence this month along the A23 frontage!

#### **Friends of Waterhall (CF)**

FW held their AGM on 27<sup>th</sup> September at Waterhall Golf Clubhouse. Recent severe lack of rain has caused the pond level to drop alarmingly. However the piers built into the water earlier this year have made small bathing areas for little birds that frequent the area, so providing them with shelter. They intend making more piers cut from hawthorn as the large amount of toad and frog spawn in the pond was definitely protected. For a second year they have found themselves without a regular ranger, and have been reliant on temporary staff, without prior site knowledge, that assisted when they could. Problems arose when sheep- knowing no better, ate the long grasses where the butterflies laid their eggs, unaware they were supposed to browse off sprouting dogwood! A couple of benches have been vandalised and others are showing signs of old age, so Charlie, a new ranger currently working there, has used his woodcraft skills to make replacements. The first, made from a beautiful piece of oak, can be seen down by the pond. Progress has been made with the Management Plan and they are just hoping it will soon be satisfactorily completed.

#### **Keep the Ridge Green (MH & CL)**

KTRG guests were welcomed to an enjoyable 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebratory evening after the July AGM, their chairman provided the cake! The Woodland Trust bid for obtaining 420 mixed hedgerow saplings was successful and these will replant areas of the ancient hedgerow. Westdene School has recently been on nature trips to the site and has offered help with the planting. Permanent fencing for Windmill Drive, under the Government's HLS grant, is due to be installed - along with a gate to plug the dangerous opening to Mill Road. BHCC's Environmental Sustainability Grant for £2,500 is to be spent on producing site leaflets and educational signage. In addition, they are still being considered for a 'Community Spaces Grant' and are busy carrying out surveys in order to meet requirements at the second stage. A consultation event will decide what to finally submit on the application. A Management Plan update meeting on November 15<sup>th</sup> will be especially important to ascertain requirements for Coney Wood, and adjustments necessary to accommodate the grazing scheme. Matthew Thomas says their ranger Emma will collaborate initially.

Notices are urgently needed to point out that the path through Coney Wood was created for pedestrian use only, as local residents are complaining of difficulties experienced, as bikers continue to cross the main path at speed on self-made tracks, at considerable danger to anyone walking there. KTRG feels strongly that footpath signs should be reinstated and bike riding prohibited. Councillors continue to give support saying biker's destructive activities will not be tolerated. It is patently obvious the problems are caused by adult sports bikers and not young people.

#### **Wild Park (DA)**

The whole thing appears to have been taken back into the council's remit and they appear to be drawing up their own plans and will report back in due course, but meanwhile it is not communicating with the community in any way about what is happening (they don't seem to have learnt the lessons of last year!). The situation is not all over and maybe more focus is needed. Dave Larkin as their ranger is only using temporary fencing for the grazing project. Local people have not been involved with the provision of replacement trees although more trees have been put at Stanmer.

#### **Friends of Preston Park (JP)**

2 x 45khz Pipistrelle bats were detected on a September walk. There appears to be some intention of creating a 'butterfly bank', but no details have been provided by the council parks section to the local group. This idea may involve importing chalk to create a 'Downland' mound in Preston Park – on an alluvial plain for the underground river Wellesbourne! ! More appropriate options, sympathetic to the local conditions for encouraging habitat connectivity within the 'Green Network' have been provided by *Eco-Logically* to the Friends Group.

**5. CSP report (SD)** It is understood that the LBAPs are now being incorporated into the Biosphere Reserve work, and, when questioned about progress - it was not known by those at the CSP meeting why the formal consultation on the draft LBAP had not taken place over the summer, as anticipated at the 6 June meeting of the CSP, and Partners had agreed that there should be better communication between BHCC's Countryside Management Team and BHWF" – a note to raise with the CSP – again!

## **6. Planning Applications (SD) (JP)**

BHCC has now formally withdrawn the submission version of the Core Strategy and decided to redraft certain elements to reflect new studies and new planning guidance emerging at the national level. A key issue is housing numbers and the council has recently produced a Housing Delivery Options Paper in preparation for what will now be called the 'City Plan'. The paper puts forward four options with different levels of housing. The Council's preferred Option (Option 2) provides for 11,200 new homes over the period 2010 to 2030 (560 per annum). Significantly this includes "a strategic allocation for mixed use development at Toads Hole Valley within the city's urban fringe". It is understood this area would provide 750 homes so we need to monitor the situation.

The City Plan is available for initial consultation between 17 October & 2 December on policies for:

- Housing targets and delivery.
- Transport.
- Employment.
- Student housing.

Main Contact is Helen Gregory (tel. 292505).

JP has asked about CP5 – Biodiversity, and if this is still to be included in the 'City Plan'. The LDF team have confirmed that "there will be an updated version of CP5- Biodiversity- in the draft City Plan on which we plan to consult in March and April next year."

**Toads Hole Valley** - The council's Green administration has proposed earmarking THV in Hove as a development site, but local councillors are stating road access could pose serious problems to the number of houses that could be built there, and that infrastructure for this size of development does not exist. This piece of land (de-designated AONB, so it is of some significant landscape merit, with adjacent SNCI) acts as a green lung against noise and pollution, a barrier to the bypass and an entrance into Hove. An online petition has been launched on [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/petitions](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/petitions) urging a rethink about building on this Greenfield site. Previously urban fringe areas were protected until 2020.

**7. Reference Library** .MR has now filled in the grant form prior to submitting to the SDNPA, where a panel will consider the request for £1095 (£795 for books + costs for dealing with it). JP will house the collection which it is hoped everyone will use.

**8. Requests to join on- line discussion forum.** The discussion forum is to enable Forum members to more easily communicate. We welcome new members who share our commitment to local wildlife conservation.

Non- members are able to send comments, as appropriate, to the Forum, requesting clarification or amendment to any posting. The site is still '*under construction*', but it is almost completed. The only additions needed are the "Start Here" and the "FAQs" page.

The discussion forum home page will be amended to add a section stating "If you wish to add a comment to this board please contact the Wildlife Forum [html contact link provided]"

**9. Web address** –available options were discussed, and [www.bhwildlifeforum.org.uk](http://www.bhwildlifeforum.org.uk) was agreed upon.

**10. Any other business.** Gerald Legg will be retiring in January but the Wildlife Forum will be able to continue using the Booth Museum for BHWF meetings. GL's colleague, Lee Ismail, is happy to be involved. We wish to extend our sincere thanks to Gerald for the many years he has helped in providing a venue for local wildlife group meetings, and look forward to working with Lee on local wildlife conservation at the Booth Museum.

**11. Time, date & venue of next meeting:** 7pm, 21<sup>st</sup> February 2012, Booth Museum.