

**Brighton & Hove's Wildlife Forum**  
Minutes: 21st February 2012 meeting at the Booth Museum

**Key actions and summary points for the CSP**

Duncan Blinkhorn (CVSF-Groundwork) & potential Green Spaces Network	- Item 4
Proposed Local Nature Partnership	- Item 5
LBAPs and Biosphere Reserve Bid	- Item 6
KTRG hopes for a solution to the long term problems with cyclists in Coney Wood.	- Item 7
Waterhall/ Green Ridge dew-pond fencing –BHCC do not understand advantages	- Item 7
Wildlife areas subjected to illegal traveller encampments- 19 & 39 acres/ Waterhall	- Item 7

**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 (PB), Brighton Urban Wildlife Group; John Patmore (JP) Eco-Logically and Preston Park resident ; Martin Wilson (MW), TWEAK-Withdean & Westdene Woods; Geoff Stevens (GS)- Friends of Bevendean Down; Roger Carter (RC), Butterfly Conservation; Duncan Blinkhorn (CVSF-Groundwork & Friends of William Clark Park); Lee Ismail (LI) Booth Museum- host

**Apologies:** Christine Fitzgerald (CF), Friends of Waterhall ; Dave Alderton (DA), Wild Park; Gill Taylor (GT), Hollingbury & Burstead Woods; Jane Hawkins (JH)- Friends of Sheepcote Valley.

**1. Chairman's welcome/** introduction of group representatives and guest, Duncan Blinkhorn.

**2. Chairman and Vice Chair** - No further nominations had been received for these posts. Members present were happy for the current Chairman and Vice Chair to continue in their positions.

**3. Minutes of last meeting** (18-10-11) were approved. **Matters Arising** - MR has approached the SDNPA funding officer regarding the Reference Library request- who suggested the possibility of joint funding with the National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Society (NADFAS), but this has proved not to be possible. JP has contacted Laurie Jackson about co-ordination roles within the Sussex Biodiversity Partnership to ensure LBAPs are prepared with key issues addressed. However, there is currently nobody to deal with this aspect, as Laurie has now changed her role to LNP officer. It was suggested that contact should be made with BHCC's funding officer to see if they can help (nb Bevendean received funding support – see below).

**4. Potential Green Spaces Network** - Duncan Blinkhorn of the Community and Voluntary Sector Forum (CVSF) and Groundwork – had approached MR about the feasibility of CVSF & Groundwork jointly supporting a network of "Friends of Parks" groups in Brighton & Hove, with these green spaces viewed as community assets. This would involve groups sharing equipment and skills etc. Other issues of importance to them were community events, play spaces and how parks/green spaces provide a resource to adjacent neighbourhoods by promoting social cohesion. Duncan distributed leaflets advertising a meeting on March 8th to discuss setting up this network.

See [www.cvsectorforum.org.uk](http://www.cvsectorforum.org.uk)

Duncan appreciated the BHWF already existed to bring together 'friends of' groups (including Parks), with a particular focus on wildlife issues, but considered there may be ways in which our network and theirs could provide something with a broader remit. In discussion, JP considered all green space to potentially have biodiversity value, and PB thought implementing wildlife issues through education might be a way they could fit in with Wildlife Forum matters. The challenge for many Local Community Wildlife groups, finding a supply of volunteers to attend work days was raised, and Duncan considered there may be people from his organisation who would be interested in helping on larger sites. A concern raised was that BHCC has tried this before (eg SCENE and Open Spaces Forum) but after initially providing support, they then cut the resource – community volunteer groups need long-term admin / co-ordination support. The meeting felt that if a Green Spaces Network was formed, then a representative from the new Network could attend meetings of the BHWF to report progress, and advise of any concerns affecting wildlife that BHWF may be able to advise/assist with.

**5. Proposed Local Nature Partnership (LNP).** Sussex Wildlife Trust on behalf of Sussex Biodiversity Partnership is undertaking the first stages of establishing a countywide government initiative called the Local Nature Partnership. Two workshops have already been held to bring together a wide range of organisations, to discuss issues and ideas about biodiversity delivery, and potential for work to be undertaken by the Nat. Park, with a third meeting to be held on 28th February at the Brighthelm Centre in Brighton. These workshops will be with the aim of involving local communities to improve the range of benefits and services provided by a healthy natural environment, and to include the interests of nature. LNP for whole of Sussex is intending to include BHCC. Local people and representatives from the city were present at both Eastbourne and Shoreham meetings. Notes from the Eastbourne meeting are available on Discussion Board.

**6. Local BAP, engagement and consultation (JP)** - Still no detailed information on the LBAP being provided by the council. The meeting on 14th December 2011 with Rich Howarth ('Biosphere Officer') highlighted how no additional resources were being allocated to LBAP production. Consultation over the Draft LBAP is planned as part of 'UNESCO Biosphere Reserve' bid. PB stated Brighton & Hove need to address their LBAP requirements soon as UNESCO will not accept the Biosphere bid without it. Timetable indicated as:

March/April 2012: stakeholder workshops.

May 2012: Public launch of Biosphere Reserve, application of which BAP is a central part.

June festival at Stanmer: launch of consultation on our draft management plan for a 1-year period.

June – December 2012: multiple discrete stakeholder engagement events

2013: LBAP could be finalised and September 2013.

Formal application to UNESCO (including management plan)

BHWF could clarify main BAP features, to ensure these are included in the Draft, prior to consultation starting.

Guidance is available via: <https://sites.google.com/site/conservationagenda/local-bap> . Please send detailed comments ASAP to assist in preparing a full input to the Draft LBAP.

England Biodiversity Strategy (updated in August 2011) was going in a new direction. The LBAP must take this into account once details are published by DEFRA (due March 2012)

LI is to organise Biosphere events, ranging through a variety of ideas, including -Nature walks in the National Park/external exhibitions on sites/ seaside ecology at the Marina.etc. Anyone arranging events in this context, that the Booth museum could help with, should contact him. PB thought it was a good opportunity to gain publicity now that the 'What's on' leaflets had been discontinued.

## **7. Local Groups updates - concerns & successes.**

**Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group (DB)** - General heavy scrub clearing is on target after the sheep did a good job, but the information board vandalised last September is yet to be repaired. An outdoor pursuit Geo Caching – is popular world wide and around the reserve along bridle paths. See

<http://www.geocaching.com/itsoutthere/howtoenter.aspx> for a real world outdoor treasure hunting game. Find the log book and see any treasure in the box. Players try to locate hidden containers, called geocaches, using GPS then share experiences online.

Dr Dan Danahar is to lead a Brown Hairstreak Butterfly egg hunt on the reserve on 25th February. David Larkin and Will Furze to give the May AGM/ talk at the Oasis Church Hall, 7.30pm, Corner of Hangleton Way/Northeast Drive. (Date to be confirmed)

The Annual Flower and Butterfly Identification Stroll is to be June 10<sup>th</sup>, meet at 2.00pm (Benfield bridge over the bypass). The Glow worm survey and count will take place on 30<sup>th</sup> June - meet 10.30pm at Hangleton Manor. All are welcome at these events.

For the first time on the reserve, two nest boxes have been put up.

**Friends of Bevedean Down (GS)**. Have investigated three butterfly transects each week from April – September continuously since 1997 with results sent to Butterfly Conservation. Volunteers have agreed to do regular plant quadrat surveys from this season, after Matthew Thomas provided details of methods. The group work closely with Bevedean Community Garden set up on the edge of the reserve, which requires a fence around this non chalk grassland site. 200 sheep grazed the permanently fenced extended area of Hogtrough bottom during Nov. /Dec., where dung was subsequently removed, from heavily used places, for the garden people, or taken home. The Heath Hill & Bodiam Ave. parts were grazed for first time in Jan. /Feb. using 49 sheep, with temporary fencing used. Work days are monthly with some mid week scrub clearing. As the area comes under a farm contract, and the farmer is not in the HLS scheme, they may not be eligible for funding for clearance. Finally, they were pleased to have produced a site leaflet towards which Tessa obtained a small grant.

**Craven Vale Community Association (RC)** - has been working on sycamore clearing and planting native shrubs. Their wildlife interest is quite substantial. At **Queens Park** communication between council members and employees working there sometimes leaves something to be desired.

**Friends of Hollingbury & Burstead Woods (GT)**. Besides usual they (BW) D(hopefully they are native) They have been in obtaining to be in soon. T foring earlier! A s beend, sof new, some boundary W. When theis d, they will createis future, the they

**Friends of Sheepcote Valley - (JH)** Good news- the Wilson Avenue hedgelaying is just about complete. Another volunteer group is going out with Paul the ranger to complete the last few metres. A fantastic achievement with work carried out over three winters. Other good news is the dew pond is being restored and enhanced. Two local schools are going to help with some of the planting work, under ranger supervision.

Having recently been involved with two LCWG sites over photographic artwork for notices and leaflets, Jane was so impressed with the quality of the wildlife photography supplied that she became inspired by the idea of a photo exhibition to show how much talent existed on Brighton's urban fringe. If costs of printing and framing proved prohibitive, maybe a digital slide show could be organised from laptops projecting onto screens? The biosphere reserve launch around the time of the festival might provide an opportunity. BHWF members thought this an excellent idea.

**Friends of Withdean Park (SD).** Their 4th December work morning was intended to be for planting proper English bluebells, but they were let down at the last minute by the Council's supplier who had problems with the bulbs, as many had apparently been damaged by frost and the rest were already sprouting. Consequently the supplier was loathe to send them and suggested waiting until March when they could deliver the bulbs "in the green". The Council could have got bulbs from other suppliers, but were not confident they would be the English type.

There had been Council misunderstandings over the role of gardeners in the Park which was accepted as being limited to emptying litter bins rather than any actual gardening – in this once important place for lilacs. Local group activities had also concentrated on litter picking! Lack of previous flexibility in the provision of a Council Ranger has led to 'first Sunday in the month' Work Mornings being changed to 'last Sunday in the month' which minimises the effect of days when the Ranger is not able to attend.

The promised mulch, to compensate for 'lack of gardeners', has just arrived. BHCC had now completed the formation of a bund and ditch arrangement along the London Road frontage to deter 'travellers'.

**Friends of Waterhall (CF)** - In autumn, another set of piers was built into the pond, with a brush hedge behind, the aim being to re-direct footfall from the waters edge and to form a protection for spawning toads, frogs and other amphibians. (Adders were less visible last year). Damage to the pond liner from the numerous dogs using the pond continues to cause erosion. Our ranger has been asked if fencing can be erected to help protect it but once again the answer is NO!

Scrub clearance has started on Year One Section of their Management Plan. Problems arose when a section of electric fencing was put up for sheep grazing adjacent to the chalk path. Notices were not highly visible and walkers complained their dogs (not on leads) were getting shocks from netting. A section near the golf course now has permanent fencing and another area is due to be enclosed late this summer, giving a total of six grazing sites. Problems arose with the last flocks regularly getting entangled in dense bramble. This needs addressing before they return, or an animal welfare issue could occur. The Dutch Elm site has been cleared by a processing company from Kent who chipped and removed all the felled timber. We understand it will be used as wood pellets for commercial heating. Travellers occupied Waterhall car park Dec-Jan costing BHCC £5,848 to clean/ sanitise the toilet/shower block after their vacation! 19 acres, a favourite nesting ground for skylarks is now occupied by N/A Travellers. The trees in the woodland where buzzards nest and perch are being cut down for fuel. Once again this section of downland has become a 'no go' zone.

**Keep the Ridge Green (MH/CL).** A meeting was held between BHCC, Local Councillors and bikers, in early February, but KTRG were not invited and to date have had no official feedback! The BHCC site to show definitive plans for Coney Wood paths was 'down' when it was tried, endlessly, to access it but suddenly reappeared – so with this information available ranger Emma Keane erected a sign at the kissing gate indicating Coney Woods path was for pedestrian use only. 'No cycle' notices also put up by Emma are mostly removed! The bikers are still, now illegally, cutting paths through the woods, but are getting challenged by walkers with the breeding season for birds/badgers getting close and dormice coming out of hibernation soon. PB considered, as KTRG were given the wood as replacement land for that lost to realignment of Mill Road 20 years ago, it must mean paths were intended be safely accessible for local pedestrian users? This fact should carry weight especially when a 'Community Spaces Lottery Grant' is currently being applied for by the group for its maintenance! Permanent fencing for Windmill Drive, under the HLS grant to accommodate grazing, has been a welcomed site addition – particularly the gate which now plugs the dangerous opening to Mill Road and fencing that joins up to the kissing gate.

CL explained that the protective pond/fence idea was turned down by BHCC –although the idea was supported at this meeting (PB thought it essential for a wildlife pond in a high dog walking area).

The successful Woodland Trust bid for 420 mixed hedgerow whips resulted in more replanting in the boundary hedgerow/behind the Mill. The BHCC Environmental Sustainability Grant is presently being spent on producing site leaflets and educational signage. A Management Plan update meeting was held in November, and necessary adjustments made, but Matthew Thomas is yet to input.

**Wild Park (DA). 39 acre field.** Land adjacent to the car park along Ditching Road was again taken over and occupied by New Age travellers. As last year, they arrived early January and BHCC finally evicted them on February 16<sup>th</sup> when they left a number of unroadworthy vehicles on the roadside, not to mention the large amount of litter and waste. A 3m driveway churned up by vehicular movements has now replaced what was a footpath!

For months over the past year alone, this site, which connects paths to and from Wild Park going up to Coldean Lane, has been repeatedly occupied. This has intimidated local people from using the land. Last year too, the nesting of skylarks on the 39 Acre Field was seriously disturbed by motorbikes and vehicles from the adjacent illegal encampment being ridden repeatedly over the area during the birds' nesting season. A large-scale clear-up was undertaken following the eviction of the latest group, although a lot of rubbish currently remains in adjacent bushes. In spite of previous and

on-going requests to reinforce the bunding properly, it is unclear as to whether this will be carried out by CityParks, for budgetary reasons? There has been concern about the way in which woodland at the north end of the Wild Park itself has been cut back in a casual fashion, possibly to provide timber for fires, since the start of the year. Some of this timber was conveyed from the site in a bicycle-type trailer (photographs of the damage are available). The matter, along with descriptions of some of those involved, has been reported to the Council and Police, seemingly to no effect! Once again the focus is on illegal activity in this area of the SDNP resulting in damage to wildlife, with an ineffectual response by the Council/ Police. One might have anticipated following the eviction, the Police would have been on the alert to prevent further incursions elsewhere around the city, but seemingly, the same group drove straight off to 19 Acres and simply set up another encampment there!

People are seriously questioning how any application for city Biosphere status and the costs attaching thereto can be countenanced while areas of National Park land within our city are being repeatedly invaded and damaged. The Council is failing to invoke powers available to it under Section 61 of the *Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994*, which would allow immediate evictions to be carried out by the Police.

**Preston Park (JP)** - A bird hide is planned for the 'Rock Garden' (west of London Road), and there are intentions to improve the water feature. Proposals to use native planting from Stanmer Nurseries in some areas of the Park are welcome, particularly for enhancing a south facing bank and creating flower rich grassland on land currently underused as a picnic table area. But there are concerns that clear objectives for the biodiversity improvements have not been prepared in advance of site preparation and planting work which starts in the spring.

**TWEACK** continues to organise monthly woodland management days. It is encouraging that recently a number of non-committee members have come along to help. Most of the work has been in the Withdean Stadium Woods and has focused on clearing sycamore and improving paths and steps. They have also worked in Eldred Avenue Copse. BHCC ranger (Neil Doyle) also brings in volunteer groups during the week to work on major tasks. The next management day is 10th March (Meet at the Withdean Stadium Woods main entrance at 10.30 am.)

They also organise a number of events to interest local residents and promote the LNR. During 2011 there was a 'family fun morning' in Withdean Woods on the day the Albion played its last home game at Withdean Stadium. The August Bat Evening + BBQ in the woods was led by Cath Laing. Finally the Christmas Wreath Making Event took place on the old bowling green below Westdene Woods. It was amazingly popular with over 100 attending! Both the Bat and Wreath Making events are to be repeated in 2012. The major problem remains a lack of an effective management plan but it is hoped to have one in the near future!

**CPRE Brighton & Hove District (SD)** reported they had submitted comments on the four topics of the proposed City Plan - Housing; Employment; Student Accommodation; and Transport (Park & Ride). The possible development at **Toads Hole Valley** is probably the most significant item, but is balanced by the addition of protection to our important countryside urban fringes; enhancement of the SNCI and the provision of Public Open Space to land which currently has no public access. However, it will need close attention to ensure that any development of Toads Hole Valley does not become more extensive than the 15 ha of the overall 45 ha now proposed. The consultation on the full B&HCC City Plan is now estimated to be starting in April/May.

## **8. Any other business. -**

- PB suggested it would be advantageous for Rob Walker to attend one of our meetings. Following the cuts to middle management, the aim is to empower the rangers, with specific responsibilities for local patches / sites. It would be useful to see how this is working and what the liaison / relationship is with local groups.
- It would be of interest to local groups to have a session with BHCC's funding officer.
- PB mentioned the South Downs National Park Nature Improvement Area DEFRA bid (worth £600k, but aiming to lever in extra funding to total of £3m), part-dependent on Biosphere / Downland Initiative progress.
- Rampion Offshore Wind Farm draft proposals have been publicised in this region and will definitely not be impact free. The RSPB have been alerted regarding any possible problems for birds, but main concerns are for the long and winding underground cable route to be taken through Nat.Park land which will involve a trench 30 metres wide.

## **9. Dates of meetings for 2012: 24 April 19 June 21 August 23 October**

Thanks go to Lee Ismail for kindly continuing the tradition of opening the Booth Museum as a venue for BHWF meeting and being our hospitable host.