

Brighton & Hove's Wildlife Forum
Minutes: 19th June 2012 meeting at the Booth Museum

Key actions and summary points for the CSP

Wildlife photographic exhibition event at Booth Museum planned for October 27 th -30 th	- Item 2
LBAP Consultation taking place 2/7 to 3/8 has very restricted list of consultees.	- Item 3
Will necessary bunding protect vulnerable sites from illegal encampments? Sheepcote/Withdean Pk.	- Item 6
A good relationship with a particular ranger is regarded as the important key to a successful group	- Item 6
City Plan needs to consider carefully the proposed development on Toads Hole Valley countryside	- Item 8

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; John Patmore (JP) Eco-Logically and Preston Park resident; Lynn Bird (LB) & Neil Smith (NS) Friends of Sheepcote Valley; Roger Carter (RC) Butterfly Conservation & Craven Vale Community Association; Geoff Stevens (GS) Friends of Bevendean Down; Lee Ismail (LI) Booth Museum- host.

Apologies: Phil Belden (PB), Brighton Urban Wildlife Group; Martin Wilson (MW) TWEAK-Withdean & Westdene Woods; Christine Fitzgerald (CF), Friends of Waterhall; Dave Alderton (DA) Wild Park; Gill Taylor (GT), Hollingbury & Burstead Woods; Pru Gridley (PG) Stanmer Preservation Society; Jane Hawkins (JH) Friends of Sheepcote Valley; Michael Whitty (MW) Westdene and Withdean Community Association.

1. Chairman's welcome/ introduction of group representatives.

2. Minutes of last meeting (24-4-12) were approved.

Matters Arising included

a) MR reported Jane Hawkins had made progress with BHCC, and updated us on the proposed photo exhibition - provisional title: "Bugs and Beasts of the Biosphere" Sub-title - "see the wonders of wildlife on your doorstep"- Saturday 27th to Tuesday 30th October to coincide with the 'autumn half term'. Ranger Chantelle Hoppé, assigned to the Biosphere project, was enthusiastic but found there was **no** budget to fund this, so it will require initiative! She and LI are confident of finding at least one compatible working set of laptop, projector and screen! The venue will be the Booth Museum kindly offered by Lee. It is envisaged that the content is to be 200 digital images in a continuous loop of wildlife images, shown in a dark room, each on screen for four seconds, with the entire sequence taking approximately 13 minutes. Viewers could join at any point and see it more than once if desired. Laminated sheets might list: common/biological name in italics/photographer. The benefits would include encouraging young people to engage with wildlife, besides publicity for the BHWF and individual groups events/workdays. LI reported the BHCC ranger service had offered to provide a volunteer each day, and enough members present showed their support for invigilating. Jane would like interested photographers to contact her ASAP and volunteers are required for a selection panel to choose final images. CL has approached Southwick camera club for possible support/participation. Publicity is also needed for this event.

b) JP confirmed BHWF is joining CVSF as agreed at last meeting. The second Green Spaces Network meeting held at Preston Park on 14th June is looking to identify its role, purpose and member requirements.

c) JP attended the 'Natural Environment 2012' event on . Notes from this Conference uploaded to BHWF discussion board. Natural England is in charge of the England Biodiversity Strategy 'Delivery Plan'. This has been written, but is awaiting the most appropriate time to launch it publicly.

3. Local BAP- engagement and consultation (JP) The Local BAP consultation will be carried out as a '*more focussed consultation*' between 2nd July and 3rd September 2012. It is disturbing to note that there is now a very restricted list of only 20 consultees. Phil Belden and John Patmore are both excluded, despite their extensive involvement with the Local BAP over the past decade! See <http://twitter.com/BrightonHoveBAP> for an information source, and look at links for useful connections. BHWF sub group is to clarify main BAP features, to ensure these are included in the Draft.

4. (JP) - The LBAP objectives are absolutely essential to strengthen the bid. A 'Food for thought' charm offensive for the 'Biosphere Bid' to UNESCO was held on 22 May 2012 at 'The Old Courtroom, Brighton'. Costs were waived for BHWF members. The Biosphere Objective was presented as:

“Together we will create a diverse and healthy local environment. Economically successful and enjoyed by all forever”.
Note: NO mention of biodiversity or nature - more like consuming the environment! [ref: www.biosphere.org.uk]

5. Potential for Grants to enable volunteers to qualify to work independently on their site. SD considered Leadership courses often at a distance should be made more accessible by BHCC taking the initiative to run them. This would certainly help volunteers leading busy lives who have only limited time to spare. There was a strong chance that BHCC insurers would extend cover to ‘trusted named volunteers’ to help encourage beneficial site work at times when rangers are unable to be present for any reason.

6. Local Groups updates - concerns & successes.

Benfield Wildlife and Conservation Group (DB) Trail bikes caused some damage to Benfield Local Nature reserve; it was reported to the PCSO in the area. The damage is healing well now there has been some rain.

Amongst the butterflies seen on the reserve in May were Green Hairstreak, Grizzled Skipper, Small Heath, Small White, Common Blue and Small Blue. An unusual find was the Hawthorn Shield bug, a pristine Green Carpet Moth and a battered White Ermine Moth. Caterpillars discovered in webs on the Spindle shrub were of the Small White Ermine moth. A successful evening’s moth trapping and identification was undertaken on the 7th June with Graeme Lyons from the Sussex Wildlife Trust and the Sussex Moth Group, after a day of heavy rain and windy conditions. The most spectacular of the evening’s moths were the Elephant Hawk Moth and Small Elephant Hawk Moth, with a total of 20 species coming to the light box. Not bad for a chilly, windy evening. See Graeme Lyons report here: <http://analternativenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.co.uk/>.

In May the Twayblades were in much evidence with a count of 29 in one day. Unfortunately the many rabbits have nipped off some of the flowers. The early Spotted Orchids suffered the same fate. Our Flower Identification Walk on the 10th June was **not** marred by the rain, which fell for the entire walk. A fantastic find of a single Fragrant Orchid, a first for Benfield, was the highlight of the walk, topping a find of 65 species of downland flowers. Our next event is- The Evening Glow-worm survey on 30th June, meet 10.30pm at Hangleton Manor Pub, Hangleton. Bring a torch and wear suitable footwear. Donation appreciated.

The group is about to undertake a membership drive in the Benfield/Hangleton area.

Friends of Bevendean Down (GS) No ranger cover was available for their last workday due to the Stanmer Nature Event (taken over from Springwatch) plans taking priority – considered site work should be of more importance? David Larkin was involved with moth trap work and a Butterfly Walk is planned. A Picnic has been arranged to celebrate their 21st anniversary. RC enjoyed being involved with transects for this group whose site he regarded as one of the most wildlife rich and varied in Brighton with both long and short grass being involved.

Craven Vale Community Association (RC) with the help of ranger Paul Gorringe they have planted a whole lot of wildflowers but brambles are rather too prevalent, glade creation continues. They recognise the good relationship with their ranger as a key to future success.

Friends of Hollingbury & Burstead Woods (GT) FHBW have decided not to attend the nature event in Stanmer (formerly Springwatch) this year as return for their efforts were minimal. They continue with usual monthly work sessions which are still attracting a good number of volunteers. On Sunday, 8th July they hold a community picnic in the new butterfly glade in Burstead Woods: all are welcome and details are on the website www.fhbw.org.uk. This event is the last of the consultation events on the draft Management Plan, which is available for comment on the Council’s website until mid July. There have been two illegal Gypsy encampments on Hollingbury Park next to the woods, but fortunately the proximity of their fires to the woodland did not cause a problem (except for the cutting of some of the branches from nearby trees) and the latest encampment was moved on after 24 hours.

Friends of Sheepcote Valley (LB) Reported that 20 aquatic plants and 160 wildflowers (on an area away from the public footpath near the pond) were planted on the 19th May workday - around the newly restored dewpond north of Stanley Deason Centre. Unfortunately the ground was like concrete so it will be a case of survival of the fittest! Fencing off and padlocking the access gate to the dewpond has proved controversial for some dog walkers whose animals enjoyed a dip but it will provide the plants with more of a fighting chance. A smaller pond feeding off the larger one has been dug out for dogs to wallow and is being reluctantly accepted. After one of the gates to the valley was mangled by travellers gaining access, BHCC has ‘bunded’ the opening to keep them out. But this cheap alternative to repairing the gate properly has not been appreciated by elderly local residents who exercise their dogs in the region and cannot now use it.

The workday on the 16th June should have been for an annual wild flower survey monitoring a square metre of land previously grazed by herdicks to compare it with a similar area of ungrazed land in order to discover how several

months of grazing had improved biodiversity. However both their own wildflower expert and Paul Gorrington were unavailable on that day so with no substitute found volunteers decided to concentrate instead on clearing a popular but overgrown path and hunting for Bee Orchids as the weather was pleasant. Summer sheep grazing has been promised for the valley as this will help enormously with keeping down the prolific young brambles that spring up everywhere.

Friends of Withdean Park (SD) The April and May work mornings have been concentrating on weeding the Lilac beds and sadly, inevitable litter picking. The Council have still not provided the promised mulch in an adequate quantity. This year's 'Lilac Lark' was on the afternoon of Sunday 13 May when the weather was relatively good after all the rain, so the event was a success. Profit was down compared to the previous year due to several added costs such as public liability insurance being required, as unlike in previous years it was regarded as a Festival Fringe event. The Council have reinforced the bunding along the London Road frontage and so far there have not been any further incursions by 'Travellers'!

CPRE Brighton & Hove District (SD) CPRE Sussex has commented on the E.ON Rampion Offshore Wind Farm proposals. It challenged the basic principles of wind power and the need for the provision of standby power stations which relates to Government policy. Putting that to one side, the E.ON proposal for an offshore wind farm with all onshore cabling being underground is seen as the least worst option. The detailed Environmental Statement has just been put out for public comment and will need careful expert scrutiny during this extended consultation period. JP brought up the dilemma of long-shore drift and what impact 100 - 195 turbines would have on geomorphological processes.

The formal consultation on the draft B&HCC City Plan has opened and closes on 20 July (eight weeks). The development in Toads Hole Valley will take much more land than was originally understood.

Friends of Waterhall (CF) The Friends of Waterhall have had little success with recent work days. On every occasion it has been pelting with rain and the day's jobs cancelled. On the plus side the water level of the pond has raised and the frog and toad breeding has been brilliant, partly assisted with the brushwood barriers that have protected the waters edge where spawn is laid. For three years they have been in discussion with the council regarding repair to the damaged pond lining and now through good luck the Group have acquired (free) a quantity of blue clay to put on the sections that need building up. This wear has been caused mainly by dog traffic.

A small flock of sheep have returned to the valley to tackle the increasing problem of dogwood and young bramble. The meadow and hill have not been grazed because of the dry winter and some overgrazing from last year. The buzzards are nesting again and although just passing through a nightingale and cuckoo have been heard in the scrub woodland. A small section of this hawthorn has been coppiced and with little help available from the Countryside Dept: they will be way behind on the Management Programme schedule: The group is still struggling with the Dutch Elm timber being burned just when the nesting season starts. Information has been given that instruction to burn comes from the Environment Agency- but Natural England does not agree with their timing policy so what hope is there for dealing with EA bureaucracy? it is at present beyond them. Earlier in the year they were told that in future the Elm would be chipped and removed, this unfortunately has not happened. Waterhall is at present looking splendid, if slightly neglected - plenty of birdsong but few butterflies as yet.

Keep the Ridge Green (MH) The CS Lottery Grant has progressed with meetings with BHCC to draw up a timetable of events throughout the year. Money will mainly concentrate on improvements to Coney Woods as requested by local people (glade creation and renewal of 100 steps down to Patcham cricket field and 50 down to Mill Road, together with hand rails). Also planned are a nature trail and the opportunity to plant suitable new trees. Finally there is funding to help boost the wildflower value of the meadow. However it is hoped problems with bikers in the woods can be solved. Presently there seems to be less around due to BHCC putting up prominent 'no cycle' signs - which are continually replaced as they are taken down! At 7 pm on the 27th May, during hot, dry weather about a dozen youths lit 3 bonfires in Coney Woods, the youths dispersed when disturbed but the fires were about to catch the tree canopy alight. The fire brigade was called and put out the fires, which they considered serious enough to report to the police as an 'arson attack'. At the café end of the site a motorbike has been seen on several occasions accessing the Green and has been reported to the community police. The workday on 11th June concentrated on clearing nettles and encroaching vegetation around newly planted Woodland Trust 'Jubilee' whips. The Group is hoping for a favourable confirmation of BHCC conditions necessary to enable selected volunteers to work unsupervised on site.

Councillors Ken & Ann Norman have fought hard to get the speed reduced on Mill Road. They have just heard that signs should now be put up to reduce speeds to 50 mph. It is hoped hatching put on the uphill overtaking lane should prevent this lane being used for excessive speeds, endangering those crossing Mill Road to get to the footbridge over the A27. The almost spent BHCC Environmental Sustainability Grant has just a site leaflet to complete. Roger Carter will join us for the annual Butterfly Walk planned for Sunday July 8th - meet 10.30am at the café - all are welcome!

Preston Park (JP-Preston Park Resident) There has been no news on the nature conservation objective. However, instead of looking to enhance connectivity with adjacent landscape habitats a small amount of planting has been carried out on the south-facing bank near the cricket pitch. The species used appear to be mostly non-native annuals from the horticultural nursery. Although they are convenient and attractive to people, they provide no real biodiversity benefit. The pump servicing the stream running through the Rock Garden has been restored. Plans to make a charge for cars parking within the Park due to abuse of this facility by commuters are progressing.

Stanmer Preservation Society (PG) The group was very busy with work to make the Nature Trail (24th June) a success. Forthcoming talks, both Sundays at 2.30 pm in Stanmer Church, Stanmer Park are:-

1. 'Roman and Saxon Excavations at Rocky Clump' by John Funnel –Btn and Hove Archaeological Society, 15th July
2. 'Bees in my Garden' by Heather McNiven from Brighton & Lewes Bee Keeping Association, 22nd July.

7. CSP (SD) The subject of destruction of green space at the 'bikers corner' of Patcham cricket field is regularly raised but to little avail. (SD was amazed that a long awaited reply to his email to John Barradell on this subject paid little attention to safety aspects which are considered to be appalling.)

The draft City Plan will run in tandem with the Biosphere Bid –originally planned to be a broad consultation –should be seen as a building block for formal duty at the very least.

8. Planning applications

-Draft City Plan (MR) An invitation has been sent to Community/LATs/Resident/Amenity Groups from BHCC regarding an event to be held on the evening of 26th June at the Banqueting Suite, Hove Town Hall. Plus an alternative daytime event on 3rd July (same venue) 10am –12 noon. The event is to provide an overview of the Draft City Plan, with workshop sessions to discuss issues of special interest in more detail. The public consultation continues until 20th July.

JP mentioned the ecological impact this huge development of the 'Greenfield' site at Toads Hole Valley would have on countryside just south of (therefore the wrong side of) the bypass, despite plans to keep the SNCI area on the steep bank.

JP reported the PPS9 'Biodiversity and Geological Conservation' is replaced by the NPPF: however some elements are still retained for planning decisions (*Government Circular 06/2005: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation - Statutory obligations and their impact within the planning system* and *A Guide to Good Practice 2005*.)

9. Any other business - JP reminded us that the Earth Summit 'RioPlus20', a United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development', was held in Rio de Janeiro, only from 20-22 June, but was, unfortunately, inconclusive.

10. Dates of meetings for 2012: 21 August, 23 October

Thanks go to Lee for kindly opening the Booth Museum as a venue for the BHWF meeting and being our hospitable host. He informed us that in future John Cooper who worked with Gerald, would be returning as new Keeper of Sciences, while Lee would be the curator.