

Brighton & Hove Council

Wildlife Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting held 7.00pm. Tuesday, 17th January 2006
Booth Museum, Dyke Road, Brighton.

Summary of Key Recommendations for the Sustainability Commission

1 Reporting to the Commission: While again welcoming the new reporting arrangements, WAG request that the Commission takes a clear view on all the Group's recommendations, rather than merely 'noting' them. The WAG will also aim to produce clear and succinct recommendations in future.

2. Preston Barracks: The redevelopment of Preston Barracks should aim to preserve and enhance the wildlife corridor which runs along the adjacent railway line, in order to protect the integrity of Brighton University SNCI.

3. Clearance of Trees by Railtrack: The council should work with Railtrack to ensure a clear protocol is put in place whenever tree clearance along railway lines is proposed. The protocol should allow sufficient time for proper public consultation and aim to conserve wildlife wherever possible.

Present:

Wildlife Advisory Group Members

Janyis Watson (JW)	Sussex Wildlife Trust (Chair)
John Patmore (JP)	Botanical Society of the British Isles
Dawn Scott (DS)	University of Brighton
Gloria Wheatcroft (GW)	Council for the Protection of Rural England
John Burns (JB)	Chairman, Brighton & Hove Allotment Federation
Maureen Holt (MH)	Keep the Ridge Green
Phil Belden (PB)	Brighton Urban Wildlife Group

Gill Taylor (GT) Secretary for Friends of Hollingbury & Burstead Woods
Martin Robinson (MR) Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group

City Council Representative

Gerald Legg (GL) Keeper of Natural Sciences, Booth Museum
Matthew Thomas (MT) Ecologist
Muir Jankowski PA to Countryside Manager (minutes)

Apologies

Carol Robinson Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group
Patrick Fitzsimons University of Sussex Bat Research Group
Katie Wilkinson University of Brighton
Hugo Blomfield Countryside Manager, Brighton & Hove City Council

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting (1st November 2005)

These were agreed as an accurate record

2. Council Downland Initiative

MT & PB: The consultant's report following the public consultation exercise will be available shortly. The findings will be presented at a special meeting to be held at 7.00pm on Monday, 20th February, Banqueting Hall, Hove Town Hall. All WAG members will be formally invited.

3. Local Development Framework

Draft Statement of Community Involvement

MT The WAG's comments will be incorporated into a report to the Policy & Resources Committee in early spring 2006. The report will include a schedule of responses to the consultation and the council's reply to these and a recommendation for approval for the revised SCI to be submitted to the Secretary of State. The schedule will also form part of a statement of consultation for the next consultation stage (the 'submission stage') which will take place in March 2006. This will trigger another formal 6 weeks of consultation. All those who responded to the draft SCI will be sent the submission version and the statement of consultation. Any further responses at the submission stage will be sent to an appointed planning inspector who will consider them and the SCI against certain tests of 'soundness' and decide the form of inquiry that is needed (written representations or public inquiry). Following the inquiry the inspector will issue a report outlining changes to the SCI which will then be adopted by the Council.

Core Strategy Issues and Options paper

MT: The WAG's comments on this paper are part of the informal 'issues and options' consultation which runs until March 2006. All responses at this stage will be summarised as part of a Preferred Options document which will have a formal consultation period between November 2006 and January 2007, when WAG will again be consulted.

4. Feedback from Sustainability Commission

The Commission's endorsement of the proposed cat leaflet was welcomed but there was also some disappointment that the Sustainability Commission resolved merely to 'note' WAG comments.

DS / PB: It is important for the WAG that the Commission forms a clear view about the recommendations made to it. More practical and succinct recommendations should be proposed to the Commission in future to promote this.

MT: Meeting dates of the WAG could change in line with the dates of Sustainability Commission meetings after April 2006 to ensure adequate lead-in times for Commission deadlines. This will be discussed further at the next WAG meeting.

5. WAG Advisory Notes – Domestic Cats

DS: Following discussion at the previous meeting, DS produced a draft leaflet for consideration by the WAG members. Intended to be non-antagonistic to cat owners, the leaflet offers researched information relating to the impact domestic cats have on urban wildlife. DS advised on the difficulties of enlisting the help of the RSPCA and Cat Protection, but assistance has been obtained through the RSPB and the Mammal Society through providing information and leaflet distribution.

Following discussion and input on content, style and leaflet emphasis by the members and other responses collated by MT, DS will revise the leaflet and forward to MT for submission to the Council for consideration. A revised draft will then be circulated for discussion at the next meeting.

6. Telephone Masts and Wildlife

GW: GW provided research collated on the effects of radiation on wildlife from telephone masts. From discussion with the RSPB, Defra and British Trust for Ornithology, the

conclusion was that current evidence is lacking and that future studies need to be carried out to investigate the possible effects on wildlife.

GW agreed to keep a watching brief on the subject; no further action by WAG to be taken at this time.

7. Brighton and Hove Open Spaces Survey

MT: A survey is to be sent out to 2,500 randomly selected individuals in Brighton & Hove. Further information is available to be downloaded from the council website. The objective of the survey is to inform the emerging open spaces strategy and the Local Development Framework.

The leaflet was circulated to members of the WAG for information and to raise awareness amongst represented groups. Comment was raised on the quantity of demographic information required which seemed disproportionately large to the size of the questionnaire and potentially off-putting.

8. Updates on Planning Applications

Watts Bank – Appeal Decision

PB & MT: In November 2005 a planning inquiry was held into Brighton & Hove Council's decision to refuse planning permission for student accommodation at Watts Bank, behind the University of Brighton's Watts Building. Watts Bank is a Site of Nature Conservation Importance.

The Planning Inspector's decision was received in early January 2006. The Inspector's letter upholds the council's decision, taking the view that proposed nature conservation enhancements do not justify damage to existing nature conservation features. In the circumstances of this application, the Inspector concluded that loss of a substantial amount of parking space is acceptable as an alternative to harming nature conservation interests.

WAG Commented that it is unfortunate that a more sustainable approach to the development could not have been taken, e.g. integrating a complementary building to enhance the SNCI rather than one which would have degraded wildlife assets. This was the positive implication of the overlapping site allocations in the Local Plan (although only

referred to in passing in the Inspector's letter). The issue should be raised with the Sustainability Commission

Since this application was submitted the council has introduced a Sustainability Checklist for all larger applications, in an effort to ensure sustainable development issues are properly considered by developers - MT

It is important that management is now introduced to the SNCI to conserve its nature conservation value. This would be the responsibility of the University and might be achieved by maintenance savings elsewhere. **DS** would consider developing a management plan as part of student course work.

MT was asked to liaise with council officers to ensure that suitable intervention is made to protect the wildlife corridor in the Preston Barracks area.

BH2005/06305/FP : Land to East of Coolham Drive

MT: The Outline planning application for this project was approved for a small, rectangular building with green roof in a part of Whitehawk Hill Local Nature Reserve with marginal wildlife interest (playing fields). This application was followed up by a full planning application for a much larger development which was also approved. However, lack of funds resulted in this (third) application being submitted for a somewhat smaller building, by which time planning guidance on nature conservation had been significantly strengthened. Recommendations to incorporate a chalk grass roof, interpretation, nest boxes and a compensatory payment to the LNR have therefore been negotiated if the application is given consent. Progress on the application can be monitored through www.brighton-hove.gov.uk (planning – planning register).

MT advised that Government guidance PPS9 (published autumn 2005) is already having a positive nature conservation impact on planning decisions such as the above case.

BH2005/06131: 1 Westfield Rise, Saltdean

MT: The application for change of use is retrospective and affects designated Open Access Land (under the CROW Act 2000) and an SNCI. A small strip of chalk grassland was sold by a farmer to a local resident who has converted it to a vegetable patch.

Despite the Open Access designation, nothing in the CROW Act can prevent this, but the new owner should have obtained DEFRA consent to dig up the chalk grassland. Planning permission is also required for change of use.

BH2004/03673/FP Brighton Marina

MT: Planning approval was refused last year, but wildlife issues did not figure significantly in the decision.

BH2005/02408/FP: Former Peter Pans Playground, Madeira Drive

MT: This has received planning permission, subject to a Section 106 agreement to establish a shingle nature reserve in adjacent land. The developer is legally required to implement the requirements of the S106, but in practice co-operation is also needed from Sport and Leisure.

9. Any Other Business

Railway Lineside Vegetation: PB Concerned about the clear-felling of railside trees by Railtrack. A voluntary agreement established some time ago that Railtrack would liaise with the council prior to any work and ensure the public are involved. However over Christmas 2005 significant tree clearance occurred along the Brighton to Hove line with apparently minimal consultation.

MT: In this case the work was instigated by the council. During summer 2005 a Dutch Elm Disease outbreak was identified along the affected section of track and Railtrack was asked to clear it. Unfortunately Railtrack chose to implement the work over Christmas, sending out letters to local residents on 24th December with a contact number that was not attended until after the New Year. Moreover substantial additional clearance took place of trees other than Elm, without the knowledge of the council. Consequently several complaints were received by the council Arboriculture Team.

Members of the WAG advised that Railtrack should be reminded of their agreement responsibilities and ensure that proper notification is put in place in future.

Albion Hill Flats: PB Raised concerns about rumours that mature shrubberies in the Tarnerland Flats area are to be cleared due to antisocial behaviour problems. Some shrub areas have already been cleared. This seems to be part of a City-wide shrub clearance campaign which will lead to impoverishment of the urban environment and consequential social problems. PB would be attending a public meeting week beginning 23rd January where plans for Tarnerland are to be discussed

MT: Has met with Cally Paddison (Drug and Alcohol Abuse Team) and local representatives at Tarnerland and has discussed setting up a 'Friends' group to redesign and enhance the area for wildlife and at the same time reduce the fear of crime. The initiative is now being carried

forward by the Environment Improvement Team who have given assurances that full public consultation and involvement will take place before any action is taken.

Sealife Centre: GW raised concerns about BH2005/06570 (Sealife Centre) which includes proposals for a water feature and animal pools. **MT:** Has no plans to comment on this application. The RSPCA may be interested.

Local Biodiversity Action Plan: JP: Following a letter to The Leader, assurance was received that an Action Plan will be produced during 2006. **MT** advised that, having been involved in writing the letter, it in fact refers to a draft Biodiversity Strategy, which will be available in the spring and which will include a timetable for producing a BAP.

Allotment Redevelopment: JB: Asked for guidance on translocation of wildlife when allotment development happens at Eastbrook Farm Allotments in Southwick.

MT: This work should be carried out by the developer and secured during the planning process. The proposal has not yet reached the planning stage.

10. Date of Next Meeting

10.00am, Tuesday 11th April, Room 126, King's House

There being no further business, the meeting closed at approximately 9.15pm.