

## Brighton and Hove's Wildlife Forum

Minutes of the meeting held 7pm , 27<sup>th</sup> April 2010 at the Booth Museum

Present:

Martin Robinson (MR)	Benfield Wildlife and Conservation Group
Dave Bell (DB)	Benfield Wildlife and Conservation Group
Phil Belden (PB)	Brighton Urban Wildlife Group
John Patmore (JP)	Botanical Society of the British Isles/Eco-Logically
Dave Bangs (DB)	Friends of Whitehawk Hill
Gerald Legg (GL)	Keeper of Natural History, Booth Museum (Host)
Maureen Holt (MH)	Keep the Ridge Green
Colin Leeves (CL)	Keep the Ridge Green
Pru Gridley (PG)	Stanmer Preservation Society
Christine Fitzgerald (CF)	Friends of Waterhall
Christine Pembridge (CP)	Friends of Waterhall
Tessa Pawsey (TP)	Friends of Bevendean Down
Mike Parrot (MP)	Friends of Bevendean Down
Peter Whitcomb (PW)	SOS/Friends of Wildpark

Apologies:

Roger Matthews	Friends of William Clarke Park
Martin Wilson	TWEAK
Gill Taylor	Friends of Hollingbury and Burstead Woods
Stuart Derwent	CPRE/Friends of Withdean Park
Ian Lawes	Friends of Blakers Park

### Summary of Key Issues and Recommendations to the CSP

Although the first Higher Level Stewardship consultation meeting held on 31<sup>st</sup> March and chaired by Roger Matthews of Natural England, had been useful, disappointment was expressed over the minutes not being ready for this meeting. It was hoped the council would provide an agenda and notification in good time for groups to prepare for the second consultation in order to prioritise local group interests.

Wildlife representatives from the various regions gave updates and highlighted concerns; site management plans were still causing worries and also the inadequate collaboration between the council and local groups.

Various wildlife walks are being held by local groups across their Brighton and Hove sites this summer.

**Introduction of groups/ minutes of the previous meeting.** MR welcomed those present, particularly Peter Whitcomb as a new member who will replace Nigel Bowie as the Sussex Ornithological Society (SOS) representative, before skimming through the minutes which were subsequently agreed to be an accurate record. He explained Roger Matthews was one of those who had sent apologies for absence.

**Update on Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) consultation meeting.** Roger Matthews, Natural England, was still in negotiation with Brighton & Hove City Council regarding their submission of the HLS Downland management application, hopefully by the end of May – to become active in September.

The successful 1<sup>st</sup> consultation held on 31<sup>st</sup> March, chaired by Roger with David Larkin taking notes, had reached agreement over general principles but minutes were unfortunately not yet available. It was hoped they would appear by the end of the week and MR would be able to email them around but we should be prepared for any eventuality. Final plans for management of sites being considered under this scheme would be reviewed under the second phase of consultations, but the minutes of the last consultation would be necessary to provide structure for the next agenda. Eventually what has been agreed for each group will have to be carried out.

**Future Local groups meetings with Countryside Manager, Hugo Blomfield** - PB reminded us we do need time to prepare ourselves for the next meeting and should object strongly if too little notice is being given. B&HCC had been producing their own plans but nothing had yet happened between them and Natural England so we should continue to be optimistic and have faith in Roger's capabilities. Any public sector grant is under huge threat but half the cash for agro-environmental grants comes directly from Europe. CF considered local groups should liaise with Martin once we have the minutes but PG suggested another meeting might be useful beforehand.

**Continued involvement with the City Sustainability Partnership (CSP) and council officer involvement –**

JP was convinced this was an important way to get the voices of local groups heard and improve the image for wildlife. Minutes should be provided for future CSP meetings in advance and current feedback from the CSP was that they had been impressed by the number of people present at the last meeting. It was also important to keep our elected council members informed.

**Name change from Wildlife Advisory Group to 'Brighton and Hove's Wildlife Forum'** –this move was to go ahead as assurance had been received from CSP members that it was recognised as having the same formal status as the WAG.

## **Local Groups updates**

**Sussex Ornithological Society (SOS)/ Friends of Wildpark** - PW represented both groups and explained there had been growing concern from local bird watchers over the savage removal of scrub causing much habitat loss prior to returning it to chalk grassland to be grazed. Complaints were mostly over the clearance of the dewpond area and while it was recognised Adonis Blue butterflies favoured southern slopes, scrub on the north slope had also been removed. SOS had received two protest letters and while DB and PB considered this an important and necessary move they were disappointed with the lack of communication with local people who needed explanations and the crudity of the work which had needed a more sympathetic approach- similar to the way the National Trust had dealt with scrub removal years ago at the Dyke. DB was also concerned that fenced off scrub would be less likely to receive the necessary management and it was younger growth that was brilliant for birds rather than the more mature stands. Most of the gorse, a feature of chalk grassland, had also been eradicated but dogwalkers did not appear to be concerned, so it was a mixed picture.

**Benfield Wildlife Group** – The talk by Paul Stevens was arranged for Wed. 19<sup>th</sup> May at the Oasis Church Hall, and was on Arundels wetland. MR told of summer events including a Chalkland flower identification walk on 20<sup>th</sup> June at 2.30 and the usual glow-worm evening on July 3<sup>rd</sup>– meeting at 10.30 pm at Hangleton Manor. A butterfly and moth talk was planned for later in the year. DB explained they had completed the winter tasks and all that remained was clearing paths of nettles and brambles. Plenty of cowslips were visible and orchids coming on well. They were still fighting privet.

**Green Ridge** - CL stated that the last three aluminium site maps had now been fixed using vandal proof screws and were displayed at the café, Windmill Drive and at the bottom of Coney Wood. A morning walk had been planned -meeting at the café at 10.30 am on Bank Holiday Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> May (see CPRE below) to show this site to interested visitors. The forthcoming workday on 8<sup>th</sup> May would concentrate on clearing around recently planted whips in the hedge. We had obtained council permission to place slabs over mud the end of the passage now the ground had dried out. Dealing with residents who tampered with newly planted trees behind gardens made life difficult at times! Twelve assorted breeds of sheep had been introduced for a week's trial around the pond area and while a few dogs had touched the electric fence, reactions from the public were quite favourable. MH met Emma and Matthew Thomas who admitted leaving the 'thatch' had created bare patches over this winter. Our butterfly walk was planned for 10.30 am at the café on 4<sup>th</sup> July.

**Friends of Hollingbury & Burstead Woods-** See [www.fhbw.org.uk](http://www.fhbw.org.uk). Gill Taylor later reported they had now received a management plan template and Matthew Thomas was hoping to come to future H& BW meetings with regard to this matter.

**Stanmer Conservation Society** – PG related how Stanmer was bursting with life now spring had brought out the violets, bluebells and early spider orchids, unfortunately the public had been picking the latter and needed to be educated on the serious effects of this action. House martins have returned to the long barn and a solitary barn owl remains close to the village. After a long wait, a replacement stag has been found to replace one killed by a dog two years ago. The cherry orchard has become a symbol of the park and the Judas tree is starting to show buds. Nests were everywhere and most of the regular species had been seen including the goldcrest, despite the severe winter; two pair of mallards were nesting close to the pond and the moorhen, generally flooded out, may hopefully decide to nest on a fallen tree stump. Dates for forthcoming events were still being planned.

**Waterhall** – CP said they had three problems – brambles, may trees and dogwood, although Japanese Knotweed had also returned. Their ranger Kim was full of enthusiasm but ideas were being squashed by middle management when she took plans back to the office. CF stated Management Plan revision was still a problem, Matthew Thomas had said theirs was among the top five to be looked at but their draft document then had to be updated to become a council draft document – Jeremy Burgess had been most helpful but they felt they were getting nowhere fast because they were being asked to find costings which needed approval by the finance department and for a small group this was daunting. They felt they had very little input now in running this site and it was becoming difficult to keep up an interest.

**CPRE Brighton and Hove District/ Friends of Withdean Park** – Stuart Derwent submitted a note on behalf of the ‘CPRE’ group who have been invited by ‘Keep The Ridge Green’ to an informal walk on the Green as part of the national CPRE’s Discover the Environment weekend. Meet at the café at the top of Dyke Road Avenue on Bank Holiday Monday 3rd May for a short walk around the Green or a longer one down the wood. All welcome. The District AGM is being held in the Rectory Gardens, 77 New Church Road, Hove at 3pm on Sunday 6th June.

The Friends of Withdean Park are holding their 5th "Lilac Lark" in the park on Sunday 9th May from 1pm to 5pm with many attractions and with the support of the Brighton Lions Club. The friends also hold working parties on the first Sunday morning of every month. Members and non-members are all welcome! - see the new website on <http://www.friendsofwithdeanpark.org.uk/index.html>.

**Booth Museum** - GL reminded us they were short staffed but permission had been obtained for a one year contract to obtain a skilled natural history assistance to help. Gerald was able to keep up with lots more records in the halcyon days before cutbacks but this post should enable Victorian taxidermy to be used in displays set up in places such as Worthing and Bexhill.

**Using the shared Wildlife Forum’s website.** Group members can register and access this shared site at any time at: [www.keeptheridgegreen.com/wag/registration.htm](http://www.keeptheridgegreen.com/wag/registration.htm) - by following the link. Discussions took place regarding an acceptable domain name for this site which should prove to be a useful resource. It was eventually decided ‘[bhwildlife.org](http://bhwildlife.org)’ was the most acceptable. Money for this was to be decided at the next meeting but costs were not expected to be high.

**Any other business** – JP was concerned that the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for ‘nature conservation and development’ relies on a simplistic ‘First Impression’ without sufficient reference to biodiversity features. The need for a non-statutory environmental assessment has been downgraded by the council (source: [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/index.cfm?request=c1199528](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/index.cfm?request=c1199528) ). PB considered this had not been working satisfactorily for some while and it was now to fall back on the general public to be more vigilant.

All local authorities should be looking at environmental impact and significant planning applications would still need to be monitored more satisfactorily. JP had been concerned by the recommended planting list for nature conservation in Brighton and Hove including so many non-native species, particularly where this is near the countryside (now termed ‘urban fringe’) in view of climate change making these plants’ future invasiveness unpredictable. Since the demise of the councils own advisory group, environmental issues were more likely to be disregarded with fewer mechanisms in place to pick up on them. Rebuilding bridges again with regard to communication over wildlife matters was something to look forward to but presently there is little this group can do.

**Dates of future meetings** this year are Tuesdays, 15th June & 12<sup>th</sup> October.

The meeting closed at 9.35pm. We thank Gerald Legg for his kind offer of the venue.