Brighton & Hove's Wildlife Forum

Minutes Aug 19th 2014, meeting at the Booth Museum of Natural History

Key actions and summary points for the CSP	
Shockingly high numbers of houses required for Local Plan by Inspector with disregard for Greenfield space	- Item 2/7
Guest Rich Howorth answered queries before BHWF agreed to becoming a partner of the Biosphere project	- Item 3
Wildlife Records located but have been sent to council ICT section as not yet in a readable form	- Item 4
Public control of dogs near ponds is problematic for wildlife but GR given permission for fencing their pond	- Item 7
List wildlife problems caused on sites frequented by illegal encampments to keep those unaware informed	- Item 6/9

Present: *Martin Robinson* (MR) Chairman, Benfield WCG; *John Patmore* (JP) Eco21st; *Maureen Holt* (MH) - notes, *Colin Leeves* (CL) Keep the Ridge Green; *Stuart Derwent* (SD) Friends of Withdean Park; *Jane Hawkins* (JH) Friends of Sheepcote Valley; *Mike Parrott* (MP) & *Graham Champion* (GC) Friends of Bevendean Down; *Norman Watson* (NW), Friends of Beacon Hill; *Marcus Oldfield* (MO), TWEAK, Withdean & Westdene Woods; *Nicola Yuill* (NY) Stanmer Preservation Society; *Hazel McKay* (HM), Toads Hole Valley; *Tracie Parker* (TP) Deans Preservation Group; *John Cooper* (JC) Geologist & Host @ Booth Museum: Rich Howorth (RH) BHCC Biosphere Officer.
Apologies: *Phil Belden* (PB) Brighton Urban Wildlife Group and South Downs National Park; *Dolly Bell* Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group; *Dave Bell* Hangleton Park; *James Newmarch* Landscape Architect; *Paul Gorringe*, (PG) Butterfly Conservation + Ranger; *Huw Morgan*, SWT; *David Larkin* BHCC Countryside Manager; *Christine Fitzgerald* Friends of Waterhall; *Chris Lowe*, Friends of Queens Park; *Rachel White* –University of Brighton;

1. Chairman's welcome to all/introduction of group representatives including Hazel McKay (THV), Tracie Parker (The Deans) on their first attendance, and Rich Howorth as guest speaker to explain the new **Brighton & Lewes Downs Biosphere UNESCO site** (on land between the Adur and the Ouse) and how it might work for us as partners.

2. Minutes of last meeting (24- 6 -14) were approved. **Matters arising** included**:**

(1) (JP) Graham Champion provided records dating back to 1994 for a range of sites. These can be accessed via the 'Library' link on the web-page. Eventually the digital file can be moved into its respective LWS folder, for BHWF members to access.

(2) **New House Building areas**: (JP) it appears the bulk of work is going into developments on 'Greenfield' sites (referred to as 'Urban Fringe' in BHCC Planning Documents). National planning guidelines require 'Brownfield' sites to be considered first under Sustainability Codes. Why is this site selection priority not being clearly presented by BHCC Development Planning in the City Plan?

(3) **BHCC Housing Delivery**: (JP) Draft report prepared by Land Use Consultants (LUC) was to be considered at Planning Meeting. Decision deferred in response to protest and objections received. However, it is not clear who will lead on the 'conservation sectors' input to the housing location proposals. This is worrying if we lose our last fragments of green space south of the NP through inaction. BHWF can advise on biodiversity and geodiversity impacts, particularly as some of the sites were proposed as 'Food Growing' locations in spring 2014.

The SHLAA (Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment) report (2013) also outlines locations of brownfield sites with potential (LUC concentrated on greenfield sites). But this information is not presented in an accessible form. There is no 'master map' with site names clearly provided, which can then link on to further details. Continuing to only present the information in a convoluted opaque fashion will only continue to alienate local groups, residents and electors who will be very concerned when the recommendations are eventually presented in the final formal consultation document.

(4) MR and JP attended the 'Green tea' provided by Caroline Lucas on 18th July together with 20 others. This was only an hour long so little time to raise many issues other than in writing. Notes and Action Points can be seen on the BHWF Discussion Board (search: 'Meetings with Caroline Lucas').

3. BHWF involvement with the Biosphere Project – MR invited RH to elaborate on how members could make use of the fact this exists in an overcrowded city and as one of few urban areas to be included in the overall scheme. Initiated by BHCC who provided core costs, maps were distributed to show how the area had grown substantially to include Lewes District and part of Adur Council; it also stretches for two miles out to sea around the coast. With an 'Urban heart,' buffer zones provide a transition area to ameliorate around more wildlife special SSSIs and SDNP regions (without which it would not exist). GC pointed out LWS volunteers have been helping with maintenance and surveys for very many years and that local people already recognise and place existing urban fringe countryside sites high on their agenda for providing essential recreation. RH as the only local Biosphere employee felt that although no financial assistance was forthcoming, positive attitudes would pull in resources to help create opportunities for education and further involvement to benefit the concept of nature conservation. He wished to extend an open invitation to BHWF to collaborate as one of its partners, stressing the Biosphere was not a 'top down' organisation and that City Parks intended to initiate an '**Open Spaces Strategy'** project where all sites would form a network to engage with

people. JP was still concerned about the LBAP policy where BHWF comments had largely been ignored, and wondered who would be responsible for promoting and monitoring biodiversity now BHCC no longer employed an ecologist? TP requested help for the 'Deans' site where development was imminent but the East Sussex ecologist had not yet replied regarding specific flora. Because the Biosphere has no statutory powers this would be beyond its remit (although RH told us he had some input into the Local Plan) JH suggested this was a political issue and Pete West should be approached. NY saw there may be advantages in stating we came under the Biosphere Umbrella; JC thought it offered a welcome opportunity for a fresh start by using our own opinions to make it work in urban fringe transition zones. The forum agreed to look positively towards joining the Biosphere Partnership with a view to constructively working together for the benefit of wildlife in this city.

4. Storing Wildlife Records – (JP) some files have been uploaded, and the folders created. It has been slow progress though, so help will be appreciated. All the information sits on John's hard drive, so just a matter of uploading it now so all BHWF members can access it too.
'CityWildlife' database files have apparently disappeared, as the 'citywildlife' website managed by BHCC just gives an 'ERROR' message now. Councillor Ann Norman was concerned enough to follow this up and reported: 'The good news is it is believed the records have been located, the not so good news is that currently they seem to be in a form unable to be read. The file has been sent on to the council ICT service to be reclaimed in a readable form.'

5. Review of web site - Are any alterations needed to the BHWF website content or layout? Please send suggested text to the BHWF e-mail address. JH thought from the design point of view it was excellent.

6. Local Groups updates – concerns & successes

Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group – (DoB) had a successful moth trapping evening with over 700 in the traps and 112 species identified. BWG Secretary Sally brought her own moth trap along and gained some valuable experience. The flower identification walk was equally successful and although it was thought we had lost the Fragrant Orchid, one of the walkers showed us a photo of one seen on the opposite side of the hillside - which had flowered much earlier, so all is not lost. Plans are underway for the weekly scrub clearing, starting on Tuesday 30th September at 10.30. An autumn talk on the "A to Z of Sussex" by Clive Hamblin is our next event on 29th October and will start at 7.30pm - Everyone is welcome. See http://benfieldlnr.tumblr.com/

Friends of Hangleton Park – (DB) have been busy organising Hangleton Park Community Festival due to take place on 30th August. All are welcome to come and enjoy the Fun Dog Show; Zorbing; Laser Quest, etc. Ongoing problems have been experienced with long grass in the 'tiny tots' play area, although this week the grass was cut but left around. The garden looks in urgent need of attention from BHCC, the awful state is partly due to the weather encouraging growth which is blocking pathways and overgrowing seating areas.

Friends of Beacon Hill – (NW) have had a few work sessions to maintain steps and paths in North Wood and tackling brambles, hawthorn and blackthorn spreading on the East side of the reserve. The Beacon hub has been granted a fifteen year lease. Problems experienced with travellers in July on the old golf course adjacent to the reserve have been resolved, but they are looking at the possibility of extending the fencing in the hope of preventing further incidents. The formal matters relating to the group are progressing well with the setting up of a bank account (using donations from Ovingdean Residents & Preservation Society and the Rottingdean Parish Council), along with the acceptance of a constitution. A stall at Rottingdean Village Fair publicised the group and gained many new members. They are now looking to raise funds a.s.a.p - just need a charity number and bank account. They are currently putting in a concerted effort to remove ragwort- presently widespread, but advice from forum members was not to worry unduly.

Friends of Bevendean Down – **(**MP) many butterflies but not many walkers seen on their butterfly walk in July. On the Saturday before this the Butterfly Society came to the reserve and the weather improved after a wet and windy start, so many species were observed. Roger Carter had recently paid them a visit. The council have said they will graze Cardboard Hill this autumn, but too late for this summer season when not one Adonis blue was recorded, sad as in the past this was the best site for finding them. BCV and the Green Gym have been working on the Down doing path clearing, revetting and also helping to erect fences.

Friends of Sheepcote Valley – (JH/LB) Out of two recently arranged workdays– the 20th July butterfly walk & picnic was cancelled as ranger PG had flu and it became too late to find a substitute leader for this normally popular event. The16th August workday involved clearing very overgrown paths which PG is getting the Green Gym to assist with shortly. Throughout June/July Travellers were present on the BMX Track area, they were eventually evicted at the end of July; what a pity bund walls have to be piled around the perimeter of the Valley to try & stop illegal invasions! As walkers don't want to go too near these illegally occupied areas many nearby paths have become overgrown.

News that the Council was planning for "Urban Fringe Development" provided a bit of a scare in July and Radio Sussex picked up on this and sent a "Roving Reporter" to East Brighton Park to talk to people about possible development in Sheepcote Valley but FSV were assured by local Councillors this was not the case because of the NP proximity and ground being contaminated by methane, meaning the area is highly unsuitable for building on.

Friends of Withdean Park – (SD) held a work morning in July with another due in August. They were again pleased to welcome the Green Gym but not so welcome were the 'Travellers' who entered the park on Friday 27th June and eventually left voluntarily on the evening of 30th June, when facing eviction to vacate the area by 1stJuly. They left their usual rubbish/ human excrement and carried out criminal damage in our park showing their normal contempt for us law abiding residents and all authority. Police used S61 of the Criminal Justice and Public Disorder Act 1994, a decision made on the basis that the number of households in the encampment had grown from 11 to 39. In addition there was an event planned for 3rd July and time was needed to clean it all up; so in the light of these circumstances police directed the trespassers to leave and FoWP are assured they can be arrested if they return within three months. The gate was re-padlocked three days later, but damage done to the main gates of the lilac enclosure means seven weeks later, these still need to be replaced. As reported at the last two meetings, FWP still await to hear from Cityparks about possible works incorporating Section 106 monies they hold from Hallmark Nursing Home development situated on the corner of Carden Ave.

Friends of Waterhall – (CF) Due to a mild winter and early summer the butterflies, dragonflies, snakes, frogs and toads have all done well so far. The new dormouse boxes have to date not been checked. Having had the pond fenced since early spring, marginal plants have survived and flourished but sadly walkers with dogs have decided their pets gain more benefit from the water than the wild creatures that rely on the pond for life. On a daily basis the fence netting has to be untangled and re-erected. Our ranger with the help of Hurstpierpoint College students built a hibernacula and again within a few days it had been demolished by visitors who prefer our conservation site *not to* support reptiles. For a period the large number of commercial dog walkers fell when sheep and travellers were in the valley. The drop in footfall was noticeable within a short time, with many recently formed exercise paths becoming reclaimed by Downland grasses. New areas of Bee and Pyramidal orchids were seen, also Yellow Rattle grown from local seed. The commercial walkers have returned so we are again monitoring the number of animals using Waterhall. To date the highest is 100 dogs in an hour! The Shakedown festival was held here for the first time this year.

Keep the Ridge Green – (MH) held their 23rd AGM in July. On the well attended butterfly walk in July, skippers appeared more prolific but marbled white numbers were down. The last information boards have been erected in Coney Wood where wildlife has noticeably increased. Adult bikers speeding down footpaths have declined in number through public pressure and installation of gates, while the *'Lunar Landscape' assault* course beside Patcham Place cricket ground has finally been filled in and made safe. Peter Craske distributed letters warning residents not to fly-tip/ carry out unauthorised work on council land behind gardens; only trained group members are allowed to carry out light, ranger approved work without supervision. Official workdays have dwindled, so more help is required to carry out essential maintenance of hedgerow trees smothered in American bindweed following historic dumping of garden waste (bindweed seeds are viable for 50 years!) In response to a petition submitted to the council, KTRG are pleased to have permission for fencing in the pond to enable wildlife to thrive without disturbance from dogs; this will be similar to the sheep fencing and to include a gate. Dog Roses and Honeysuckle along Windmill Drive fence are thriving, but many wildflowers planted around the meadow are not, showing it is notoriously difficult to introduce plug plants successfully into established meadows as there is too much competition from existing plant communities. Far preferable to provide correct management to enable native Downland flowers to increase naturally by grazing at the right time of year (Oct. to Feb. inclusive) or annually cutting the verge beside Mill Road hedge and *removing* cut grass to prevent enrichment. The Green Gym has been booked by Peter Craske for two workdays in September (18th & 25th).

Preston Park – (JP, local resident) A Bat Walk was held in Preston Park on Monday August 11th.
Some of the non-native flowering plants planted in the old Bowling Green last year are beginning to bloom. These were mostly annuals, so the numbers of flowering heads are significantly limited compared with last year's display.

Stanmer Preservation Society – (NY) have experienced problems at weekends with inconsiderate parking blocking access for the number 78 bus into the park. There is a plan for some informative signage to remind people of the bus service and how parking in certain areas disrupts it. Their ranger reports that double yellow lines painted on the road past the house seems to have improved the situation. There will be a programme of gate maintenance across the estate, repairing and numbering gates to help in reporting any damage.
The situation regarding 'traveller problems' has been particularly serious over this summer, with reports of damage and conflict and a visitor avoiding the park altogether because of such reports; but a large group of them has now been moved on and there is an aim to move on one or two caravans now in car parking areas. The ranger will be starting hazel and sweet chestnut coppicing again in early October. NY is not aware there has been any response from the

council to our submission about the Stanmer HLF bid plan, but she will be attending a meeting set up by BHCC HLF group for an update on the plans. SPS have run out of popular Nature Trail leaflets so are looking into funding for printing a revised edition (mentioning the geology of the park!)

TWEACK - Withdean and Westdene LNR – (MO/MW) recent activities have concentrated on completion of the new Nature Trail in Withdean Stadium Woods. Thanks to efforts by BHCC Ranger Neil Doyle with support from EDF volunteers, the BHCC Friday Conservation Group and TWEACK, the trail, signs and booklets were all ready for the opening on July 12th. About 50 people attended on the day, which began with various wildlife activities organised by the group; Huw Morgan (SWT) and Neil Doyle. The weather was perfect and families enjoyed a relaxing picnic in the meadow, finally the Trail was opened by the Mayor of B & H. The trail is most suitable for children aged between five and eleven accompanied by adults & all children were given a copy of the new booklet and together with their parents went around looking for the 36 signs mentioned. Copies of the booklet can be downloaded from www.tweack.org.uk. Printed copies are also normally available from Windmill Stores, Eldred Avenue. TWEACK are planning to have a few copies available at the main entrance to the reserve so if visitors decide to bring children or grandchildren, the group would welcome any comments. So far reactions have been very positive. The next woodland management day is at 10.30 am on Saturday 6th September and will involve hedge cutting and path clearance in the Eldred Avenue Copse.

John Cooper – explained '*The Sussex Geodiversity Partnership*'(SGP) operating under the auspices of the SWT and meets about twice a year. Members represent the County Council, the SWT, local societies, universities, SDNPA etc. The basis of the SGP's concerns are the protection of our earth science heritage through 126 designated sites of geological importance (RIGS) and the promotion of the science besides providing an authoritative geological voice. They recently met with English Heritage who has confirmed that they can fund the Sussex end of the Strategic Stone Study which identifies important stone built buildings, identifies the source of the stone and if local protects that source for possible future conservation. We await further developments. The Partnership liaises with GCUK, the Association of UK RIGS groups who have developed a nationwide RIGS monitoring project with NE. SGP has reported on its RIGS using this process and as a result has been awarded £1260 towards its work. SWT is the beneficiary and the money will support its work with the SGP. Their website can be found at :http://www.geodiversitysussex.org.uk

7. CSP (SD) – attended the July meeting where housing numbers were discussed together with a subsequent additional meeting. SD had previously assumed that 24,000 in 20 years was 'wrongly reported' but the figure was stated as being correct. Previously the Planning Inspector (PI) quoted 16,000 to 20,000 but apparently the Office of National Statistics update population figures to the council every six months and these feed into required housing numbers. This frequency is astonishing! With the Draft City Plan allowing for 11,300 over the 20 year period plus an additional 1,180 from the current Urban Fringe Review plus some other changes a total of 13,000 is reached. The offering up of some 1,200 on the Urban Fringes ***is just opening the door to more*** and that appears to be what Laura Graham (PI) seems to want - her words regarding Urban Fringes are "No stone to be left unturned" and Urban Fringe numbers have to be with her in December. The gap to 24,000 is absolutely huge and the widespread view is that we are already ***'full up'.*** When adding extra student accommodation – not included in housing numbers - the increase is even larger. SD made several references to the full utilisation of Brownfield sites and although assured all possibilities had been investigated he remained unconvinced as the few examples cited were dismissed. BHCC planning officers have a dilemma because if the PI finds that the City Plan is "not sound" BHCC can discover they lose control of the City Plan with central government deciding on proposals for sites! (HM stated she felt at the inquiry BHCC planners had exasperated the Inspector by failing to comply and not trying hard enough to find alternative sites).
Regarding comments in BHWF minutes about people with guns & who to report to, members of the CSP were appalled to hear of the issue and apparent lack of police interest. Their view was to write to Katy Bourne, Police and Crime Commissioner. Subsequently Inspector Jon Carter has requested further information.

8. Planning –

(1) SD continues to support Patcham and Hollingbury Conservation Association (PAHCA) in their endeavours to protect local water supplies threatened by the newly proposed Permanent Travellers' Site at Horsdean. PAHCA are formally recognised in the Planning Conditions as consultees in relation to the detailed proposals and have submitted a schedule of issues to be considered but have not received any response so far.

(2) (JP) Application for Housing on field near Ovingdean, land South of Ovingdean Road, by Pegasus Planning Group Ltd. Outline application some matters reserved, registered 1 August 2014, ref: BH2014/F02589.

(3) "Work is about to start on a city centre 'oasis' as part of London Road regeneration in Brighton, giving permanent improvements to public space in front of St Bartholomew's Church. The aim is to create an oasis for people living, working and visiting the area. Councillor Lizzie Deane, deputy chair of the council's environment, transport and sustainability committee, said: "*It's an under-used part of the city which many people don't know about and enhancing it will help bring people in, and contribute to the economic growth of*

London Road." Despite BHWF contributing to the 'extensive consultation with the local community' there are no biodiversity benefits included in the new 'oasis'. This demonstrates how, disappointingly, BHCC seem reluctant to include biodiversity objectives into their plans, despite having the 'Biosphere Reserve' status from UNESCO.

9. Any other business – (1) **(**JP) Send information about forthcoming events to BHWF e-mail, and they can be promoted on 'Twitter'.
(2) MR reported that Southern Water has given £25 as recompense for their late reply concerning the destroyed rare orchids. This was given to the Booth Museum as a token of our gratitude.
(3) MH considered listing major wildlife problems experienced by sites continually targeted by travellers would help convey difficulties to the attention of those in more central regions who had no idea what experiences were being faced.

10. Date of next meeting –28th October. Thanks go to John Cooper for kindly opening the Booth Museum as a venue for the BHWF meeting and being our hospitable host.