Brighton & Hove Council

Wildlife Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting held 2pm, Tuesday, 7th October 2003
at Hove Town Hall

Present:

Wildlife Advisory Group Members:

Jenny Bowen (JB)	English Nature (Chair)
Carole Robinson (CR)	Benfield Wildlife Group
Dave Bangs (DB)	Friends of Whitehawk Hill
Dawn Scott (DS)	University of Brighton
Gloria Wheatcroft (GW)	Council for the Protection of Rural England
Janyis Hyatt (JH)	Sussex Wildlife Trust
John Patmore (JP)	Botanical Society of the British Isles
Maureen Holt (MH)	Keep the Ridge Green
Patrick Fitzsimons (PF)	University of Sussex
Sheila Fleet (SF)	Friends of Bevendean Down

City Council Representatives:

Crispin Kirkpatrick (CK)	Council Local Nature Reserves Officer
Matthew Thomas (MT)	Ecologist (minutes)

1. Apologies for Absence

Gerald Legg	Booth Museum
Phil Belden	Brighton Urban Wildlife Group
Henri Brocklebank	Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre
Jane Willmott	Countryside Manager
Susan Wilson	Sussex Wildlife Trust

2 Minutes of the meeting of 15th April 2003

2.1 These were agreed as an accurate record.

3 Feedback on the recommendations of 8th July 2003

Cliff Top Grassland: MT met with Jon Curson (EN) to discuss cutting options but due to a misunderstanding a representative from Karl Heyman's team did not attend. Jon said that he intended to write to Karl setting out EN's concerns, but MT has heard no further news.

Local Strategic Partnership: Contact successfully made with Simon Newell of the 2020 Partnership, who has since attended a Biodiversity Action Plan meeting (see item 7, below).

Sustainability Commission: A meeting between the Convenor of the Commission and the Chair of the WAG has not yet been arranged.

***Action**: MT to arrange a meeting between the Convenor of the Sustainability Commission and the new WAG Chair (see item 10, below).*

Open Spaces Forum Steering Group: Susan Wilson has been invited onto the Group and attended two meetings.

Councillor Field Trip: Councillors attended a successful Local Groups Forum meeting at Sheepcote Valley during the summer.

Farm Gate at Green Ridge: Jane Willmott has arranged for the gate to be secured as requested.

4 Other matters arising from the minutes of 8th July 2003

West Pier: There has been no news from the developers on their redevelopment plans since the fires.

Court Farm Landraising: No news since July.

Southern Water Wastewater Treatment Works: No news since July.

5 National Park

DB: Full Council has recommended a change to the Council's preferred NP boundary agreed in February. The 'motion of recommendation' boundary closely follows the one originally proposed by the Local Groups Forum. It will go to Policy and Resources Committee on 22nd October where it must be endorsed to become Council Policy. If endorsed it will be defended by the council at the forthcoming Public Inquiry, due to commence on 18th December.

The Chair proposed the following motion (seconded by MH):

"The Wildlife Advisory Group congratulates the council on its brave decision to revisit its preferred National Park boundary and to take on board local knowledge and the excellent work of the Local Groups Forum."

Update: On 22nd October Policy & Resources agreed that Toads' Hole Valley and Ladies' Mile should be within the council's preferred boundary. These sites will therefore be defended by the council at the Public Inquiry.

6 Local Nature Reserve Update

CK: Currently negotiating the legal text of a management agreement with Sussex Wildlife Trust. This is needed before Withdean/Westdean Woodlands can be declared an LNR.

Whitehawk: Later in the autumn there will be a consultation on whether to include the Wilson Avenue land within Whitehawk Hill LNR.

Ladies Mile: The new Friends Group is going well – 25 people came to the inaugural meeting and 35 came on the guided walk.

7 BAP Progress

JP: Reported on a 'business & biodiversity' meeting on 29th September with representatives of the Local Strategic Partnership and the Brighton & Hove Business Community Partnership. It was agreed that the Community Plan is light on environmental objectives generally and ways of improving this for the next revision were discussed.

JH: The LSP has a poor representation from environmental interests, which may explain the lack of references to it. There is a danger the environment will become a 'bolt on' rather than being integrated with economic and social interests to create a truly sustainable document.

DB: Unhappy with WAG involvement in LSP in principle – should focus instead on 'grass roots' interests. There should be a reassessment of the BAP sub-Group and its future direction.

MT: Presented a timetable for taking forward the Local BAP, based on the draft habitats and species agreed at the last meeting. This would involve a report to the Sustainability Commission in October and a public consultation in the December edition of 'City News' to involve a wide a range of people in the process from the beginning.

DB Concerned about the draft priority habitats and species. These should more closely reflect national ecological habitat types – particularly species-rich calcareous grassland, which is severely threatened in Brighton & Hove but is not listed as a separate habitat type or given high priority in the local list.

JB: Need to look again at the prioritisation of habitats and species to ensure it links with the national process. Also need to assess the purpose of a public consultation more closely and develop a clear strategy.

DS: Perhaps we could develop a hybrid of the national system with the local, sector-based approach?

The Sustainability Commission paper has since been withdrawn. A paper, taking account of the comments at the meeting, will be prepared for a BAP sub-group meeting, to be arranged as soon as possible.

8 **Natureweb**

MT : Draft design of the web site now complete ('mind map' design attached). Web designers and database designers plan to have a test site available before Christmas. Feedback from WAG members welcome.

The WAG welcomed the project as an important step forward in raising the profile of local nature conservation issues.

9 **Planning Application Updates**

BH2003/01817/FP: Watts Bank: MT: Negotiations with Brighton University are continuing following rejection of the application by the Planning Applications Sub-Committee. It is hoped that a more sustainable scheme can now be developed which takes account of the location of the proposal.

10 **Election of new Chair**

CR nominated John Patmore, who was seconded by CK. JP was therefore duly elected as the Chair of the Wildlife Advisory Group for 2003/4.

Many thanks to Jenny Bowen for all her hard work this year!

11 **Liaison with the Press**

It was greed that the following items should be promoted:

Natureweb
National Park boundary

12 **AOB**

CR: Concerned about a report that the Church of England is planning to close several churches in Brighton & Hove and this may have repercussions for important green space, trees etc. around them. GW reported damage to trees in the graveyard adjacent to the Hove Tesco development. MT: If the changes require planning permission, the council can effect the outcome, but otherwise will need to rely on the voluntary co-operation of the church. A 'Graveyards and Cemeteries' BAP would need to address this.

CR: Foxes have been digging up bones at St Helen's churchyard. MT agreed to forward details of the Fox Project (The Old Chapel, Bradford Street, Tonbridge, Kent, TN9 1AW. 01732 365340 / 367397, http://www.innotts.co.uk/robmel/foxproject/)

MH: Keep the Ridge Green planted some crab apple trees near the café. Unfortunately these were cut down by the council's gang mowing contractor. Can these be replaced? Furthermore the second cut at Green Ridge did not happen. It seems the arrangements set up to improve communication between the gang mowers and local groups are not working properly. MT agreed to notify Karl Heyman.

PF: Asked for an audit of the WAG's achievements. MT agreed to produce a paper for the next meeting.

JP: Counted approximately 11,000 Autumn Ladies Tresses at the Roedean School site. These have benefited from the specially tailored grass cutting regime this year.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at approximately 4.00pm

Date of Next Meetings:

7.30pm, Tuesday 13th January, Booth Museum
10.00am, Tuesday 6th April, Hove Town Hall
7.30pm, Tuesday 6th July, Booth Museum
10.00am, Tuesday 9th November, Hove Town Hall

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