

Brighton & Hove Council

Wildlife Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting held 10.00am Tuesday, 11th April 2006
King's House, Grand Avenue, Hove

Summary of Key Recommendations for the Sustainability Commission

Request that the Commission considers the draft protocol on line-side trees (attached) with a view to its endorsement for agreement with Railtrack

Request that the Commission endorses the 'cats and wildlife' leaflet (attached) for printing and distribution.

That liaison with local 'friends' groups should be addressed and good practice established as a part of the emerging Open Spaces Strategy.

Present:

Wildlife Advisory Group Members

Janyis Watson (JW)	Sussex Wildlife Trust (Chair)
Angela Marlow (AM)	Sussex Wildlife Trust
Carol Mortimer (CM)	English Nature
Carol Robinson (CR)	Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group
Dawn Scott (DS)	University of Brighton
Gill Taylor (GT)	Secretary for Friends of Hollingbury & Burstead Woods
Gloria Wheatcroft (GW)	Council for the Protection of Rural England
Helen Fazakerley (HF)	Preston Park Wildlife Group
John Burns (JB)	Chairman, Brighton & Hove Allotment Federation
John Patmore (JP)	Botanical Society of the British Isles
Katie Wilkinson (KW)	University of Brighton
Maureen Holt (MH)	Keep the Ridge Green

Patrick Fitzsimons (PF) University of Sussex Bat Research Group

City Council Representatives

Matthew Thomas (MT) Ecologist (minutes)
Henry Christie (HC) Environment Improvement Officer

Apologies

Phil Belden Brighton Urban Wildlife Group
Hugo Blomfield Countryside Manager, Brighton & Hove City Council

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

JP: Correction to AOB, Local Biodiversity Action Plan : WAG requested a BAP for Brighton & Hove be produced in 2001. This has not yet appeared. In the mean time it is important that BAP objectives are consistently promoted by the WAG in all consultations.

2. Matters arising from the minutes

Council Downland Initiative

MT: No news from Property Services since the meeting of 20th February.

Draft Statement of Community Involvement

JW: The SCI has now reached the 'submission stage'. There is now a second opportunity to comment on the revised draft – comments must be submitted by 8th May.

MT: WAG's original concerns related to predictability and transparency. Not had the opportunity to read the revised SCI in detail but understands it is an improvement on the original. WAG members are encouraged to submit their comments on the latest revision. For further information go to: www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/index.cfm?request=cI147825.

Telephone Masts and Wildlife

GVV: Has compiled further information which will bring to the next WAG meeting.

Sustainability Commission lead-in times

MT: In order to fit with Sustainability Commission report deadlines it will be necessary to change the next two WAG meeting dates. The following new dates were agreed:

27th June (instead of 11th July), 7pm, Booth Museum

26th September (instead of 10th October), 10am, Room 126, King's House

Watts Bank

DS: Working with students to produce a habitat management plan for the site, to help ensure its future.

3. **Feedback from Sustainability Commission**

MT: All WAG's proposals were endorsed by the Commission at their meeting of 22nd March. Since the last WAG meeting MT has had a very useful meeting with Mark Jago, Preston Barracks Project Officer, who has confirmed that the current plans preserve the green strip adjacent to the railway line (although a planning application is still some way from submission). It does seem that reporting to the Commission has helped to give the WAG increased credibility across the council.

5. **BAP Update**

MT: A draft biodiversity strategy will be ready for the end of May in time to feed into LDF development. If all goes well with internal consultations, the draft will go to the Sustainability Commission in August and on to Environment Committee in September. WAG members will be circulated the draft for comment at the same time as it is forwarded to officers working on the LDF – there will be time to make changes up to mid-August.

A discussion followed about the content of the strategy and **JP** expressed concern about the need to develop clear biodiversity targets and actions for Brighton & Hove as a matter of urgency.

MT: Thanks to WAG involvement and JP's input in particular, Brighton & Hove has a list of agreed species and habitats requiring habitat and species action plans. Additional resources are needed to progress these and this will be discussed in the draft strategy.

Interviews for the new full time post to support the School Grounds BAP, funded by the Wildlife Trust, a private business and English Nature 'Countdown 2010' money, will be held on 19th March. The council is hosting the new post in Countryside, Hove Town Hall.

JW & DS: Very important to monitor achievements.

MT: The LDF process includes a mandatory annual monitoring report that will need to take account of biodiversity. Further resources will be required if this is to be meaningful. The issue will be addressed within the biodiversity strategy.

JP: To write to the council expressing concern about the level of resources directed to biodiversity.

6. Protocol for working with Railtrack

MT tabled a draft protocol which had been approved by the council's arboriculture team but not yet by Railtrack. The following comments were made:

CM: How is the cut wood dealt with? Opportunities for creating new habitat, such as dead wood piles, should be taken, rather than chipping all the wood or taking it away.

JW: Good practice should require an assessment of the overall environmental impact of proposed tree works, not just whether it meets legal species protection requirements.

PF: The protocol should explain when a tree is dangerous so that people understand the issues.

Surely Railtrack has a rolling programme of work which should be predictable several months in advance – this should be released to the council so that proper preparation is made.

JB: What is 'operational railway land' – how far does it reach back from the tracks? We need to know what railway land is not operational because this will fall under different rules.

DS: Line sides form an important part of the green network of the City – as a public body Railtrack should be looking at a proper habitat maintenance programme, not just cutting trees reactively.

JW: The Highways Agency has written its own BAP for trunk roads – Railtrack ought to have done the same thing. Also need to find out whether similar protocols exist elsewhere in the country so that the council could glean from them.

MT thanked the Group for its comments, which would be incorporated into a revised draft for consideration by Railtrack.

Recommended:

MT to revise the draft protocol to take account of WAG recommendations and forward to the Arboriculture Team for their consideration and consultation with Railtrack.

MT to ask Arboriculture to approach their Railtrack contacts about similar protocols elsewhere and whether they are considering a BAP for the rail network.

7. Advisory Notes – Domestic Cats

DS: Tabled a revised draft leaflet for consideration. The British Mammal Society and RSPB have both said they are willing to endorse it, but no commitment as yet from Cats Protection or the RSPCA. Funding also needs to be secured for printing – cat alert manufacturers have been suggested.

JP: Should promote this as a WAG advisory note – important that it is seen as advice rather than the council telling people what to do.

Other suggestions:

- Include contact details – use CityWildlife?
- Promote quick release collars – some cat owners are concerned about fitting normal collars
- Colours need brightening up
- Distribution – libraries, etc and pet shops – perhaps BTCV could help?
- **JB:** The Allotment Federation would be happy to distribute to its members.
- Should aim to have the leaflet ready to distribute at Brighton & Hove Goes Wild on 4th June. Perhaps the WAG could have a promotional board at the event too.

Recommended:

DS to adapt the draft leaflet to take account of WAG recommendations and to approach organisations for their permission for formal endorsement.

MT to approach the Sustainability Team re funding for printing.

6. Open Spaces Survey

MH: Has been carrying out a survey of people attitudes to key natural open spaces on the urban fringe in Brighton & Hove. Interested to find out whether local ‘friends’ groups have made a difference to the management of these sites and to look at whether improvements can be made. Concluded that:

Although Friends Groups are making a difference to their own ‘patch’ they have not succeeded in changing the way the council thinks! Concern that the council does not listen

to local groups and could communicate much better with them - work is sometimes carried out without people understanding why.

CR: Better on-site interpretation would help, particularly any that is both vandal-proof and can be changed by local groups from month to month.

There was a general discussion about problems with lack of communication between the council and local groups and the council not listening to local views. A land trust was mooted as a possible alternative way of maintaining open spaces in the City.

MT: These issues could be addressed by the forthcoming Open Spaces Strategy

Recommendation: MT to invite a representative from Parks to the next WAG meeting to talk about the Open Spaces Strategy and its objectives.

7. Albion Hill

HC: Introduced the Environment Improvement Team (EIT), a new team established with funding from the Home Office with a remit to identify six crime hotspots in the City and to work closely with local communities and partners to address the causes of crime through environmental improvements. The team comprises three officers and one senior officer and works across traditional boundaries. HC was attending WAG to address concerns raised at the last meeting about Albion Hill, one of the six crime hotspots targeted by the Team.

Albion Hill has had a serious drug and alcohol abuse problem linked to the overgrown shrubberies planted in the 1960s. Regular maintenance has not taken place given the estate an unkempt appearance.

Following consultation with local residents, EIT carried out some pruning work to existing vegetation and is putting together plans to enhance the areas ecology, for example by putting in new shrub planting and nest boxes.

WAG welcomed the initiative and encouraged its replication elsewhere.

8. Pocket Wildlife Areas

HC: Interested in identifying those small pockets of land in the urban area which tend to be poorly maintained and usually collect rubbish, detracting from the appearance of an area. A good example is a small bank behind Boots at King's Street / King's Place which is owned by the Council but not maintained. This sort of area could be improved for biodiversity (e.g wild flower planting) and public amenity at relatively little cost. Ongoing

JW: Could involve local business – asking the to adopt & manage an area

HC: Asked if anyone was aware of similar things happening elsewhere or if WAG members know of other sites similar to the King's Place example. Please contact HC direct at: henry.christie@brighton-hove.gov.uk.

9. **Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance: Biodiversity**

MT: The draft guidance will be circulated shortly to WAG members as a 'sneak preview' prior to going to Sustainability Commission on 24th May. The plan is to then take it to Environment Committee in July to authorise the release of a formal consultation draft over the summer, with a view to formal adoption in October.

10. **Planning application updates**

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

MT: Chalk grassland roof now agreed with the applicant – technical details still being sorted out.

BH2005/06279/FP: Waterhall Golf Club

MT: Planning application to extend a car park into Waterhall SNCI. MT has objected. Comments available on the CityWildlife Forum.

BH2005/05594: King Alfred site

MT: The latest submission fails to integrate any nature conservation features, other than a single Peregrine nest box. MT has objected. Comments available on the CityWildlife Forum.

11. **Any Other Business**

CM: BBC Springwatch is looking for species to film – asked the WAG for suggestions. The following were out forward:

- Bat roost at Dorothy Stringer school
- Pied Wagtail roosts on the top of Brighton Marina cinema car park and the silver birch at Asda, Hollingbury
- Peregrines at Sussex Heights

JP: Will be attending the Sustainability Conference on Water on 20th April. Will report back to the next WAG.

CR: A planning application is expected shortly for a development at Benfield Valley Golf Course – biodiversity implications expected.

Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group will be hosting a talk on bees on 17th May – all welcome. Contact Carole at 01273 414936/735237 for more information.

10. Date of Next Meeting

7pm, Tuesday 27th June, Booth Museum

There being no further business, the meeting closed at approximately 12.30pm.