

Brighton & Hove's Wildlife Forum
Minutes: 24th April 2012 meeting at the Booth Museum

Key actions and summary points for the CSP

Why does BHCC still refuse to use the term 'Biodiversity' (ignoring its legal duty?)?	- Item 2
Rob Walker (BHCC Operations Manager, City Clean) guest: greening open-space & empowered rangers	- Item 3
Forum to submit response to LBAPs consultation under JPs lead	- Item 6
Rob Walker agreed to look into the matter of Insurance Cover for local groups' 'named trusted volunteers'	- Item 7
Illegal traveller encampments' unreasonable behaviour on BHCC Parks & Open Spaces	- Item 8
Possibility of Biosphere Event at Booth Museum to show local wildlife photographic talent	- Item 10

Present: Martin Robinson (MR)-chairman, & Dave Bell (DB), Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group; Maureen Holt (MH) –notes, & Colin Leevs (CL), Keep the Ridge Green; Stuart Derwent (SD) Friends of Withdean Park & chairman of CPRE Brighton; Phil Belden (PB), Brighton Urban Wildlife Group; John Patmore (JP) Eco-Logically and Preston Park resident; Martin Wilson (MW), TWEAK-Withdean & Westdene Woods; Jane Hawkins (JH) & Neil Smith (NS) Friends of Sheepcote Valley; Nicola Yuill (NY), Stanmer Preservation Society; Roger Carter (RC), Butterfly Conservation; Robert Walker (RW), Brighton & Hove City Council-Guest; Lee Ismail (LI) Booth Museum- host

Apologies: Christine Fitzgerald (CF), Friends of Waterhall ; Dave Alderton (DA) Wild Park; Gill Taylor (GT), Hollingbury & Burstead Woods; Geoff Stevens (GS) Friends of Bevendean Down; Ruth Baxendale (RB) Friends of Three Cornered Copse; Pru Gridley (PG) Stanmer Preservation Society. Lisa Attwell(LA)

1. Chairman's welcome/ introduction of group representatives and guest, Robert Walker.

2. Minutes of last meeting (21-2-12) were approved. **Matters Arising** At their March JP reported the pw as in biosphere - only the terms BAP objectives do strengthen our Bid!

3. Robert Walker, Operations Manager, BHCC. RW gave an interesting and informative talk on how the structure of his section worked. David Larkin and the ranger service reported to him but Jan Jonkers is Head of Strategy to which Matthew Thomas reports; hopefully all should be heading for the same targets! Recent council cutbacks had eliminated the Countryside Manager Post and other positions not directly relating to 'wildlife group' interests may yet be reviewed. City Parks was originally the term for management of urban parks but some park / some countryside work, including urban fringe countryside was now within its remit.

English biodiversity strategy was going in a new direction so BHCC had also undergone big changes with a trend for urban open space management away from 'green desert' attitudes. A series of pilot schemes had taken place with regard to housing grounds maintenance, once short cropped grass was being replaced by wildflowers of local provenance wherever it was possible; John Gapper and his son Mark were well respected for providing these. (JP pleaded for more attention to be paid to making sure everything was actually native.) Surveys with local people had shown more interest in wildlife than local food production and a desire to expand into orchids in consultation with Kew was really popular. Wakehurst was keen to assist by using seed gathered from local sources. BHCC had cut their use of bedding plants and hoped to encourage private gardens to follow their lead as it was so necessary to provide wildlife havens in a city where greenspace was at a premium.

The question of closely mown verges was raised where naturally occurring species often suffered, but a positive public reaction was being noticed, especially in E.Brighton on shallow chalky soil. The public did not tolerate rank long grass especially in high dog walking areas for obvious reasons and as a service provider they need to please everyone! People reacted well to longer grass where bulbs had been planted and maybe guideline information could result in further acceptance of natural vegetation? Dog fouling was a difficult area with Community Support Officers and council officers only able to prosecute if offenders co-operated by giving their names.

PB asked how empowering the rangers with more specific responsibilities for local sites following recent cuts, might work? And what liaison relationship local groups might now expect from BHCC? It would be of interest to know who to approach over various issues (as happened with Carl Heymann, now long gone - but the principle was good)

4. Potential Green Spaces Network and CVSF - There was no further news regarding the GSN.

It was agreed that we should apply to join the Community and Voluntary Sector Forum. A number of BHWF participants are already members, and the benefits could include relevant courses.

5. Local Nature Partnership (LNP). At the m the it was agreed this was the as just another way of networking, originated by Sussex Wildlife Trust with potential for work to be undertaken in the whole of East & West Sussex and the SDNP.

6. Local BAP, engagement and consultation (JP) – Some progress with the ability to provide information on the Council website. BHWF to clarify main BAP features, to ensure these are included in the Draft, JP suggested a sub-group meeting with MR, PB & SD to work on a response.

7. Potential for Grants to enable volunteers to work independently of the ranger service. While sites like Sheepcote and Benfield qualified by having enough people with leadership/first aid/insurance requirements, others were stuck when rangers were unable to be present. MR had investigated the possibility of Group 'block policy' insurance through BTCV but this had not proved possible. MR said apparently Adur council provides insurance cover for trusted 'Friends of' volunteers. RW kindly agreed to look into insurance issues to see if there was a chance that BHCC insurers would be willing to extend cover to 'trusted named volunteers' to help encourage people to do reasonable site works - as the trend was to encourage volunteers as part of the 'big society' - without having to overcome insurmountable barriers.

8. Local Groups updates - concerns & successes.

Benfield Wildlife and Conservation Group (DB) – Have completed a successful winter period of scrub clearing they look forward to the rewards! Finding the Brown Hairstreak butterfly eggs has prompted a reassessment of the Blackthorn hedge management on the reserve. Butterflies seen to date include Red Admiral, Peacock, Orange Tip, Brimstone and Speckled Wood. Early flowers noted, some where scrub was cleared, include Wild Violets, Ground Ivy and Cowslips - early orchids were just showing. Adders, Common Lizard and Slow worms were also seen, but the dry spring slowed grass growth, so less fungi apparent. Six nest boxes, predominately for Blue Tits and small birds were put up and within a short time were inspected, fought over and residence taken up! After requests for a bench on Benfield Hill, ranger Will Furze, with help from Charlie Yates, produced one where it now commands a good position with views up the valley. Back garden robberies at Warene Road, Hangleton, have continued along the footpath behind bungalows leading to the Downs. Ornamental garden pots etc. have been stolen and the Police have been alerted. The Annual Flower and Butterfly Identification Stroll is to be June 10th, meet at 2.00pm (Benfield bridge over the by-pass). The Glow worm survey and count will take place on 30th June - meet 10.30pm at Hangleton Manor. All are welcome.

Craven Vale Community Association (RC). Glade creation with Paul Gorringer continued with wildflowers including cowslips, being put in, but the compost used was peat-enriched despite being provided by the council. RW later stated the tree planting compost with peat in it was a mistake, the ranger had not noticed its peat content.

Friends of Hollingbury & Burstead Woods (GT). Severe cold in February meant trees donated by the Woodland Trust were unable to be planted as planned, but this was finally accomplished in March with an extra work session scheduled to finish the last few. Later heavy rain made digging easier! Litter was cleared from Triangle Copse and areas to the north of the woods including a huge amount of broken glass - an old greenhouse was suspected as the culprit, from a near proximity to the allotments.

The draft Management Plan, about to go for consultation, will be available for perusal and comments via the Council's website and local libraries. See website for more details- www.fhbw.org.uk. The AGM will be May 19th, 2:30 pm at the Brian Foster Environment Centre, Stringer Way (Surrenden campus). Dan Danahar will talk about the Council's Biosphere Reserve bid and there is a chance to look round Dorothy Stringer's Butterfly Reserve – all welcome.

Friends of Sheepcote Valley – Sec.Lynn Bird wrote: after 4 years and thanks to the energy of ranger Paul Gorringer, the Wilson Avenue hedgelaying project from the Recycling Centre entrance opposite Vines Cross Rd to Stanley Deason sports centre was complete. Volunteers had received assistance from the Green Gym and BTCV. Monitoring chalk downland flora to discover how several months of herdwick sheep grazing had improved biodiversity would soon take place. Areas of scrub and sycamore saplings had been cleared to reveal chalk downland for future improvement. Paul had secured a grant to renovate the existing dewpond with the help of Sussex Wildlife Group and over the next few months work will take place to encourage dragonflies etc, and bring more diversity to the area. Dave Boddington had led the Early Morning Bird Song Walk - with Paul in attendance. Good weather and publicity provided a turnout of about 25 people who listened to and saw over 22 different birds - including Linnets, Whitethroats, a Peregrine Falcon and even a solitary Swallow to show Summer is on its way!

A recent downside was the travellers encamped in East Brighton Park around the FSV lock up, necessitating removal of power tools to a members' shed for safety! These travellers then only moved from EB Park to Stanmer! On 11th April over 40 travellers vans + vehicles arrived in the small field off Wilson Ave adjacent to the Recycling Centre - the Travellers Liaison Team are yet to evict them. The encampment is visible from nearby Wilson Ave so local Councillors and the MP have had aggressive complaints from people / dog walkers phoning for information and action.

Friends of Withdean Park (SD). The 25th March work morning tidied up the ponds with removal of rubbish and branches which had been thrown in, plus general park litter clearance. However 'Travellers' breached the council's new bund along the London Road frontage and spent Easter weekend in the park. They committed their normal criminal damage with neither the Police nor the Council taking any effective action. They also threw many branches and litter back into the ponds negating work carried out by 'the Friends' less than two weeks before! The AGM was held on 10th April, attended by Cllr Carol Theobald and Robert Walker from the Council. The continued lack of a shared council gardener and 'Travellers' were major issues, however members were not given any confidence on either of these topics. On a more positive note the Friends - supported by their Ranger Will Furze - finally planted 5,000 English bluebells in a glade in the woods at the top of the park. This year's Lilac Lark is on the afternoon of Sunday 13 May.

CPRE Brighton & Hove District (SD) awaits the formal consultation on the draft BHCC City Plan. They understand that it is being presented to BHCC Cabinet Meeting on 10th May with the consultation period likely to start in "late May/early June". Toads Hole Valley will be an issue of major concern.

Friends of Waterhall (CF) - April brought sufficient rain to raise the pond water level but a marked drop in amounts of toad and frog spawn this year noted. Travellers, currently back at Waterhall, prompted a distressed call from a walker alerting attention to 20 people from the traveller community in the dewpond with nets and buckets churning up water trying to catch spawn and tadpoles. But no luck with trying to contact or gain acknowledgement from the ranger, Pete West, Bill Randall, Chris Hall or the police over this! Surprisingly the last illegal encampment was evicted after only a few days but sadly not before they left a quantity of their usual rubbish behind. Adders have already been basking in sunny spots - due to earlier dry conditions, which may also have caused primroses to flower less and grass in the wildflower meadow to hardly grow! Brambles caused havoc for sheep last year but will be cut back before they return. Ranger Charlie asked BHCC not to flail blackberries entirely along the unmade road, but to leave some for nesting/perching birds, but an over-enthusiastic operator cut everything down to soil level thus exposing rubbish and plastic blown off sports pitches. The rugby field path towards the bank has been gradually eroding, although repairs have been asked for, no agreement has been reached on how to do it. Although burning Dutch elm diseased trees stopped, the day the bulk tipper and chipper arrived on site to remove the wood, all that happened was a huge pile of chippings appeared, logs were shifted then restacked and machinery and lorry disappeared for good! Recent weather has led to earlier flushes of insects but for insectivorous summer migrants, adjusting to change is hard. A hen harrier was seen over the valley on 3 occasions, probably en route from coastal marshes in Europe to northern heather moors, they live on small mammals so Waterhall may have provided a snack! The little owl is still around together with red legged partridge in the farmer's meadow and pheasant in scrub. Chiff chaffs have arrived and many more visitors will be passing through.

Keep the Ridge Green (MH). It has just been announced that the group has been successful in being awarded its eagerly awaited 'Community Spaces Lottery Grant' the first stage of which started December 2010! BHCC's Environmental Sustainability Grant for producing educational signage to fit on six oak lecterns around the meadow has almost been completed. Emma Keane, ably assisted by Will Furze, needed to dig two foot holes to accommodate the notice boards where Butterflies, Meadows, Hedges and Copses information is being displayed. Two Welcome signs indicate KTRG is part of the SDNP and depict visible famous landmarks. The much admired artwork using local talent for photography has been executed by Jane Hawkins. Permanent fencing recently erected to accommodate grazing has indirectly helped by joining up to the kissing gate where previous fencing had been broken by bikers for easy access. They now carry bikes over to reach the woods but Emma has erected signs indicating the path is only for pedestrian use and has explained the situation. The outcome of a meeting held between BHCC and local Councillors in early February has been largely inconclusive; although the litter situation has improved the whole area remains a very dangerous eyesore now visible to visitors using the London Road after the recent felling of two mature trees. Our annual Butterfly walk is planned for Sunday July 8th - meet at 10.30 at the café - all are welcome. CL was concerned over rather severe tree thinning management being carried out along the A27 (in a dormouse sensitive region). RW later advised that the Highways Agency not BHCC was responsible and has emailed to ask who the contact might be and will forward details when he has any news. KTRG is a group that struggles over meeting the BHCC conditions necessary to enable its volunteers to work unsupervised on the site.

Stanmer Preservation Society (PG & NY) have allocated sufficient funds (£220) for at least three schools to visit Stanmer Park Great Wood Nature Trail to input into the Big Lottery-funded Nature Trail Guide, visits start on 1st May. The official opening of the Nature Trail will form part of The Festival of Nature in Stanmer Park on the 24th June. Over 20 children came to Stanmer for a Seed Bomb making event, followed by an SPS guided walk in the Great Wood where children threw their 'bombs'. For one boy it was the first time he'd been encouraged to get his hands dirty! A Healthwalks 'Olympic Rings Walk' took place in April. Stanmer House footpath objection is to be made on behalf of SPS in conjunction with the Ramblers Association but still a little more work is needed. This Society is investigating a Stanmer Land Trust idea after concern about piecemeal management of Stanmer Park development, with its potential threats to wildlife, historic buildings and use of the park as a 'green lung' for the city. It

is discussing this with its members, other park visitors, local politicians, council officers and the SDNPA. As part of this they are seeking advice about the potential impact on footpaths and badger trails of heavy overuse by cyclists.

Wild Park (DA). Later it was discovered a herd of 13 horses (believed to be owned by travellers) had escaped and were running loose but were later returned to the field – they are believed to have grazed there all winter?

Preston Park (JP-Preston Park Resident) - There has been a and nwith included anhunt for in April and on ndA is to be held please food

TWEACK (Withdean and Westdene Woods LNR) have since the last meeting held two woodland management sessions. In March the steps at the north end of Eldred Avenue Copse were repaired. In April they prepared stakes and revetment materials (using small trees from the woods) for repairing the paths in Withdean Stadium Woods. Parts of the steep pathways are in urgent need of repair and Neil Doyle hopes to be able to bring in a group of weekday volunteers to complete the major part of the work over coming weeks. The next ‘management’ day is Saturday 12th May (10.30 at the main entrance to Stadium Woods). 2013 is the groups 20th Anniversary and they intend to apply for a grant for improved signage, leaflets and interpretation boards. Beech trees that had to come down in a hurry by Withdean stadium had *Ustulina deusta* disease which causes rots.

8. CSP - the Rampion Offshore Wind Farm exhibition/ presentation by Eon - PB was concerned that instead of taking the shortest route, they are proposing a long winding route zig-zagging across the Downs, up and down, through chalk grassland, destroying cultural heritage and affecting rights of way, including the South Downs Way National Trail.

Traveller issues and their effects on the countryside were discussed, also mentioned was the destruction of greenspace at the ‘bikers corner’ in the corner of Patcham cricket field.

9. Planning applications Stanmer House Stables conversion to housing is to be called in by the SDNP and SPS will be making an objection, they have also written to the council about the construction of a large ‘temporary’ car park and vehicle turning circle on the green outside the house. Also mentioned were the ‘grow lights’ to benefit grass around the Falmer Stadium.

10. Any other business - On JP will be attending the in on behalf of the Forum.the Anyone else wishing to accompany him will be welcome.

Photographic exhibition - LI suggested JH should collaborate with Ellie Newland regarding a venue at the Booth Museum. LI considers some money might be available as part of the Biosphere bid, mid- August Urban Wildlife day event (& possibly week before and after) to promote the high standard of wildlife photography in the region- deserving to be shown off. Any offers of assistance with arrangements/ suggestions for publicity/ format would be welcomed. CL has approached Southwick camera club who would need further details and Paul Gorringer has shown interest.

9. Dates of meetings for 2012: 19 June 21 August 23 October

Thanks go to Lee Ismail for kindly opening the Booth Museum as a venue for BHWF meeting and being our hospitable host.