

Brighton & Hove Council

Wildlife Advisory Group

Minutes of the Meeting held Tuesday, 17th July 2007
Booth Museum

ADDED COMMENT

Key Recommendations for the Sustainability Commission

1. The WAG supports the creation of new wild flower meadow areas close to where people live. This serves the dual purposes of benefiting biodiversity and improving access to and enjoyment of it.
2. The WAG strongly advocates the adequate provision of accessible, natural green space in Brighton and Hove as part of the emerging open space strategy. Adequate provision should take as a minimum the national standards established by Natural England and should plan for the future needs of an expanding population to 2026.
3. WAG strongly supports the publication of the Supplementary Planning Document on Nature Conservation and Development, including a systematic, fair and consistent method for calculating a provision for biodiversity in new developments. Native species of local provenance should be used in all landscaping schemes.

Present:

Wildlife Advisory Group Members

Cath Laing (CAL)	Sussex Bat Group (Chair)
Colin Leeves (CL)	Keep the Ridge Green
Duncan Jenner (DJ)	PMP
Helen Fazakerley (HF)	Friends of Preston Park
Jane Field (JF)	Natural England
Jane Terry (JT)	Council for the Protection of Rural England
John Burns (JB)	Chairman, Brighton & Hove Allotment Federation
John Patmore (JP)	Botanical Society of the British Isles (Vice Chair)
Martin Robinson (MR)	Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group
Maureen Holt (MH)	Keep the Ridge Green
Paul Crethern (PC)	Council for the Protection of Rural England
Phil Belden (PB)	Brighton Urban Wildlife Group

City Council Representatives

Jane Willmott (JW) Countryside Manager
Matthew Thomas (MT) Ecologist (minutes)

Apologies

No apologies were offered.

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting (17th April 2007)

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

2. Matters arising from the minutes

JW: The Springwatch Festival Family Fun Day on 12th June was very successful again with an increase in attendance over last year.

MH: There was a large demonstration at Green Ridge about the proposed mobile phone mast that was covered in the Leader and the Argus. The council has been compensated by the developer responsible for creating the gap in the ancient hedge.

3. Flower Rich Meadow Creation

MT: Funding has been found to create flower-rich 'meadow' areas on council land close to where people live, such as parks, areas of green space around council housing and road verges. The plan is to test different meadow creation methods at a number of different locations (still to be defined) with a view to extending these areas in future years. Consultation with local people will be essential to success to ensure people understand what is happening. Suggestions for the locations of the test meadows are welcomed.

Suggestions included: land behind the Rotunda, Preston Park; the sides of The Level, the green wedge through Moulescoomb; the edges of car parks, Surrenden Road central reservation and churchyards.

4. Brighton & Hove Open Spaces Study

Duncan Jenner of PMP introduced the study, being carried out on behalf of Brighton & Hove Council by PMP. The final strategy will define future open space needs and so make a crucial contribution to future planning decisions for the city.

PMP have been asked to:

1. Identify current and future local open space needs.
2. Audit existing local open space provision.
3. Set local open space standards for different types of open space which address quality, quantity and accessibility.
4. Apply the new standards to the city to determine where there may be deficits and surpluses of open space both now and in the future.
5. Identify options for addressing the outcomes of stage 4 as part of a vision for future open space provision and how it might be delivered in practice.

The conclusions of the study will be used to guide future planning decisions and provide a basis for the council to develop its own detailed proposals for neighbourhoods and individual open spaces.

Duncan asked the Group to volunteer the key issues for open spaces in Brighton & Hove. Issues mentioned included:

1. The availability of the Downs and sea does not mean that people have access to adequate natural green space close to where they live or that they are able to experience it on a daily basis. The important issue is accessibility and how adequate natural space can be integrated into new development.
2. Connectivity between natural open space should be promoted.
3. Brighton & Hove is unusual in having the AONB/downland running right up against the urban area. Urban fringe areas are therefore very important for public access to natural green space – consequently there are many ‘friends’ groups and much community interest in the urban fringe.
4. The beach is not a natural green space. Although it has tremendous potential, the beach is currently very limited in its ‘naturalness’ and should not be taken into account in attempting to address the Natural England ‘ANGSt’ standards (there are however some discrete sections of the beach of much higher biodiversity value).
5. School expansion to cope with increasing numbers of children is putting pressure on playing fields and other green space under school control.
6. Brighton & Hove is unusual in having a high percentage of flats without access to private space – these tend to be in the parts of the city with the least natural green space. This should be taken into account in devising the accessibility standards.

7. Brighton & Hove relies heavily on 'windfall' sites to meet its housing quota and these are often 'backland' development on mature, overgrown gardens which tend to be rich in urban biodiversity.
8. Need to take account of some areas where large-scale growth is proposed (e.g Brighton Marina, King Alfred) which could significantly change findings based on current needs alone.

PMP are about to circulate questionnaires for the public to record their views on open space in Brighton & Hove. It was agreed that these should be made available to WAG members for circulation to their contacts. It was recommended that in their responses, WAG members should state that they represent a local group rather than responding as individuals.

Duncan Jenner's contact details are: PMP, 48 Warwick Street, London, W1B 5NL. Tel: 020 7534 3934. Duncan.jenner@pmpconsult.com.

5. Setting BAP targets for Brighton & Hove

CL: New targets have been set for England Biodiversity Action Plan habitats. They are all based on three objectives: maintain extent; achieve condition and expand habitat. The Sussex BAP has extrapolated the England targets to county level to establish minimum local targets, based on percentages of the total, local resource.

Brighton & Hove is working with the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre to define a clear baseline of habitats so that the percentage-based targets can be converted into actual areas of land. The Sussex BAP group is carrying out detailed spatial modelling to define the potential for habitat expansion – ie predicting where the increased habitat could go. This can be fed into the development of the Local Development Framework.

The WAG looked forward to receiving more information on the project as it developed.

6. Nature Conservation & Development Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

a. Choice of species for planting schemes

The discussion continued from the previous meeting on whether the draft SPD should require only the planting of native species of local provenance in urban planting schemes, or whether non-native species of wildlife value should also be recommended. JP submitted a paper setting out the case for the former.

After further discussion it was agreed that, as a wildlife advisory group, the WAG should recommend the use of native species of local provenance only.

JMP comment (for next meeting) The discussion was not about planting schemes across Brighton & Hove. There will always be private plantings, and developers are ultimately free to determine their own planting scheme in accordance with the law on invasive species. The only issue the WAG is advising on is the planting recommendations for progressing nature conservation objectives. These should be consistent with biodiversity action plans and targets, hence the importance of planting locally appropriate native species.

MT explained that although he understood the WAG's position, it would not be realistic to expect only the use of native species of local provenance in all urban planting schemes. The draft guidance already requires the use of such species outside the built-up area and in the urban fringe. It also defines the cultivated species of wildlife value which should be used in inner urban plantings and the final guidance will also include a list of terrestrial plants which should not be used (the draft already includes an equivalent list of aquatic species).

b. Quantifying 'added biodiversity' (Annex 6) worked examples

The WAG had previously considered a draft Annex 6 which contains a detailed prescription of the habitat requirements of new developments. A revised draft was tabled which attempted to take account of WAG concerns. Worked examples were tabled, from small, householder developments to large schemes.

After discussion the WAG considered that basing requirements on site area alone might be too simplistic in that large, high density schemes would contribute proportionately less to biodiversity than schemes of lesser density on an equivalent area of land. Account should be taken of floor area of the number of habitable rooms to ensure equity.

7. AOB

JW: The council has submitted an expression of interest to DEFRA to administrate LEADER funding. LEADER is a delivery mechanism through which money allocated to the Rural Development Programme for England can be spent. It is designed to enable 'bottom-up' community involvement in rural development. If successful the bid would provide a way of resourcing the Downland Initiative.

MT: The amended Habitats Regulations come into force on 21st August. The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) (Amendment) Regulations 2007 will address current gaps and inconsistencies and create greater legal certainty in a number of areas. For example

'incidental result of a lawful operation' will no longer be a valid defense for damaging a bat roost or great crested newt pond.

CL: Concerned about the loss of trees at Aston House – potential damage to nesting birds.

MH: A very good year for Glow-worms on Benfield Hill – 488 counted in one night.

PB: The annual local groups get-together is on Thursday 19th July, meeting at 7pm at the café in East Brighton Park. All welcome.

The Countryside Agency has begun a consultation on the Inspector's boundary recommendations for the new National Park. Revisions made to the boundary around Brighton and Hove should be welcomed but omitting the Wealden Greensand area is disappointing. WAG members may wish to mention these points in their responses to the consultation.

CL: The British Trust for Ornithology has published an excellent booklet titled 'Managing habitat for birds and other wildlife in urban green spaces', available at http://www.bto.org/survey/complete/bht_leaflet_05.pdf.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at approximately 10.00pm.

Date of next meeting: **10.00am, Tuesday 16th October, Room 122, King's House**