

## Brighton and Hove's Wildlife Forum

### Minutes of the Meeting held 7pm, 15th June 2010 at Booth Museum

#### Present:

Martin Robinson (MR)	Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group (Chair)
Phil Belden (PB)	Brighton Urban Wildlife Group
Dave Bangs (DB)	Local Naturalist
John Patmore (JP)	Botanical Society of the British Isles /
(CF)	riends
(GL)	Keeper of Natural History, Booth Museum (Host)
Pru Gridley (PG)	Stanmer Preservation Society
(TP)	riends
Mike Parrott (MP)	riends
(GT)	riends
(MH)	(minutes)
Colin Leeves (CL)	Keep the Ridge Green
Stuart Derwent (SD)	CPRE / Friends of Withdean Park

#### Apologies:

(MW)	
Roger Matthews (RM)	Friends of William Clarke Park
(IL)	riendsof Blakers Park
Peter Whitcomb (PW)	Sussex Ornithological Society/ Friends of Wild Park
Bernard Evans (BE)	Friends of Sheepcote Valley
Jane Hawkins (JH)	Friends of Sheepcote Valley
Dave Bell (DBe)	Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group

#### Summary of Key Issues and Recommendations to the CSP

B&HCC are implementing the Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme on Urban fringe open access land – further detailed consultation meetings are due to be held during July to address the needs of the Local Community Wildlife Groups, collectively (broad principles) and individually (detailed site-based issues). It is hoped the council will provide more details and notification of which meeting each local group will be attending in good time for them to prepare for it.

Wildlife Groups' representatives gave their site updates and this time concerns were expressed over the Ranger service being stretched and/or diverted to other tasks and not having sufficient time or available knowledge (training need?) to keep up with the requirements of the many and varied sites; management plans were making some progress as were solutions to the major criticism over inadequate liaison and collaboration between the council and local groups.

Various activities continue to be delivered by local groups across all the Brighton and Hove sites.

**Introduction of Groups/ minutes of the previous meeting (27th April)** – After a welcome to everyone, MR skimmed through the minutes which were subsequently agreed to be an accurate record, apart from a query over interpretation in the report from Wild Park. MR asked each group to submit a 'write up' of their own activities/problems for the minutes in future to avoid any such confusion.

**Matters arising** - a discussion took place regarding the very useful site meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> June with B&HCC officers in an attempt to resolve problems at Wild Park, and to which several members of this Forum were invited, including Peter Whitcomb. Resources were apparently being made available to provide positive engagement between local groups, communities and the council. PB reported that the council had acknowledged they didn't always get everything right and seemed to be in the process of moving to a more consensus form of politics. SD asked how other councils dealt with their greenspace issues but Brighton and Hove are considered unusual in owning such a considerable amount of open access land around the city.

**Update on Higher Level Scheme (HLS) consultation meetings.** Roger Matthews, Natural England, had reported the HLS Downland management application - together with Brighton & Hove City Council - was close to being submitted now, but there was little more to report on the matter at this stage. Final plans for management of sites

being considered under this scheme would be reviewed under the second phase of consultations to be held in two sessions at the end of July. This should help re-start future local groups meetings with B&HCC / countryside team.

David Larkin had proposed two city-wide HLS meeting dates; these were for Thursday 22nd July (north & Hove) and Thursday 29th July (east) for consultation around HLS prescriptions for ca 30 individual sites. Invitations will include not only community group representatives, but would be widened to include 'local wildlife experts'. Meetings will be held in Committee room 1, Brighton Town Hall from 6.00pm to 9pm. There will also be an article in *City News* explaining the process and inviting people to contribute views. PB considered we needed to have more information on these meetings very soon now and had queried information concerning the existence of some local groups about which we knew little. TP hoped it would shortly be made clear to us which meeting each group would be attending.

**National Park** - a meeting has been arranged by the council for Tuesday, 20<sup>th</sup> July with an officer from the shadow National Park Authority (NPA) which will be of interest to sites in or close to the SDNP boundary.

**Sites of Nature Conservation Importance / Local Nature Reserves & Biodiversity Action Plan** - Matthew Thomas (B&HCC ecologist) had recently met with representatives from professional environmental organisations to scope out the consultation into a local sites review and producing a city BAP. A meeting has been proposed to include Dave Bangs and John Patmore, before formal consultation later this year:

- (1) Matthew will be surveying local sites between June and September with the intention of producing new management plans and taking the results back to discuss with experts during October/November. More meetings are planned for December-March. Both LNRs and SNCIs will be involved and there will be proper consultation with local people. An interchange of ideas between wildlife experts and amateurs, who had better knowledge of their sites, was to be recommended.
- (2) JP was amazed that after so many years B&HCC was at last providing us with some hope of producing a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for the whole jurisdiction - where there was currently no voice for biodiversity to be prioritised over other issues. Proposals considering B&HCC aspiring to 'Biosphere Status' were questionable while they were still struggling to keep up with their open spaces management policy. A UNESCO representative was due to make an initial visit regarding the 'Biosphere Reserve' topic in July.

**Liaison with the City Sustainability Partnership (CSP) and council officer involvement** – This was succeeding in getting the voices of local groups heard and the *Summary of Key Issues and Recommendations* should continue to be provided for future CSP meetings in advance. Contacting and involving Councillors and the three newly elected local MPs about our various issues and events was considered to be a positive move. It was agreed that we needed to keep this in mind if relations with B&HCC officers are not constructive. SD thought we also needed to keep an eye on the new structure being implemented at B&HCC with its high level Strategic Leadership Board.

**Groups site map and public contact details** - JP considered it would be helpful to show where the Local Community Wildlife Group (LCWG) sites are + website link and we also need to have a current contact name that the Forum can all use, as many do not know where the sites are let alone who to contact! If people are nervous about their personal details becoming too easily available this can be just an address on the public site map of Brighton and Hove (draft recently distributed). Most LCWGs are obviously more familiar with their own individual area, but it is beneficial for these to join up holistically to enable the bigger community picture to emerge. Each group is to check and mark the extent of their territory (with help from John if required!). Need ALL groups to be shown on map.

**Planning applications** - SD mentioned there had also been a revised PPS3 on 'garden grabbing' and housing densities. MH considered a halt was needed to the growing loss of mature gardens which provided wildlife havens around the city. JP brought up the subject of the St Augustine's Church conversion to flats due to be decided by the planning committee. The applicant's 'Biodiversity Survey' did not even mention bats!

The massive off shore wind farm to be visible from Brighton, was brought up, as was the concept of a wildlife corridor at the open market site. CL was disappointed in the ineffectual New England road 'green walkway' idea where the rail authority had been non co-operative in allowing the public to go across their bridge- and the slopes on either side of the steps had reverted back to winter flowering heliotrope once again.

## **Local Groups updates and current concerns**

**Bevendean Down** (TP) – carrying on with tasks to maintain chalk grassland by strimming and clearing encroaching hawthorn and raking off material where contractors have cut it down. In an event run for local families, children helped cut down hawthorn regrowth and had a BBQ provided by Garry, the ranger. DB questioned the position of the fence running up and down the slope as it appeared to leave out some of the chalk grassland (which the farmer had said cattle would graze) - this needs to be addressed by the HLS meetings. A Butterfly Conservation Society member was carrying out butterfly recordings on a weekly basis.

**Hollingbury & Burstead Woods** (GT) - FHBW are concerned with the amount of garden waste and rubbish being dumped by local residents in Burstead Woods. Our group attended the 'Springwatch' event at Stanmer Park, but we were not very impressed with the allocated site as it was on a slope and faced outwards; the theme for our competition was 'B for Butterflies' and this was won by an eleven year old boy. We entered the Royal Forestry Society competition and very eminent judges quizzed us on the topic 'How we engage with the community' and how we manage the woods: we think we impressed the judges, but are not too hopeful of our chance of winning! Our work with schools continues and we had an exhibition about our group and work at Patcham library for 5 weeks. We have a stall booked at the Dorothy Stringer Summer Environmental Fayre on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> July from 2-5pm and Matthew Thomas will be coming to speak to us on the 24<sup>th</sup> June about the Management Plan.

**KTRG** (MH) - Publicity using sheep around the pond area during April and May has been successful with few complaints (and dogs were kept out of the water) - although long term grass maintenance for this site still needs addressing if we are to maintain the flower meadow created over the past 15 years. Bare patches and soil enrichment left by the 'mulching' is already growing nettles! Along the ancient boundary hedge, problems still exist with residents whose gardens back on to the green removing stakes and tubes from trees and strimming vegetation and grass on council land, but the dumping rubbish situation has greatly improved. Ranger Kevin, helped by probation service volunteers, provided an excellent new fence to replace one which was disintegrating alongside the wildlife sensitive area at the top of Coney Wood. This should help keep bikes on the main pathway – they have also placed bark chips over the mud there. We look forward to welcoming Roger Carter to assist with our Butterfly walk on 4<sup>th</sup> July.

**Withead Park** (SD) - The 5<sup>th</sup> Lilac Lark to raise funds was run together with the Brighton Lions Club on 9<sup>th</sup> May and opened by the Mayor, Cllr Ann Norman; it was well supported despite the dull cold day. Work mornings, supported by the Council Rangers, are run on the first Sunday of the month and everyone is welcome to come. However no council gardener has yet been spotted even at the promised reduced rate of one day per month; but the council does still cut the grass regularly.

**CPRE Brighton and Hove** (SD) - The main current issue has been influencing B&HCC on the Core Strategy/Local Development Framework (LDF)/Development Plan Document (DPD). This particular issue relates to the protection of the Urban Fringe - Policy S4 - where in general terms protection is provided against development until 2020 but not beyond - which is illogical and unsatisfactory. There has also been the recent Eric Pickles (*Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government*) letter stating their intention to rapidly abolish Regional Strategies and return decision making powers on housing and planning to local councils. CPRE will also be attending the 4<sup>th</sup> Dorothy Stringer Summer Environmental Fayre on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2 - 5 pm.

**Benfield Wildlife Group** (MR) - all was pretty quiet at present but scrub clearance would commence once again in October. There was a meeting to identify chalkland flowers on Benfield Hill on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> June meeting 2.30 pm on the bridge over the bypass, and the annual glow-worm evening on 3<sup>rd</sup> July, meeting at 10.30 pm at Hangleton Manor. A.II would be welcome at both events. Sadly Martin reported in his Spring Newsletter that this year for the first time a pregnant ewe had been killed in a horrific attack on the flock by a dog at West Hove Golf Course. More checks subsequently revealed dogs off leads and running alongside the fence worrying sheep although 'The Protection of Livestock Act 1953' states heavy penalties for dogs which worry sheep - so unless the dog is exceptionally well trained it should be kept on a lead near sheep!

**Sheepcote Valley** (BE) – we have agreed to co-operate with the 'Serendipity' group that works with youngsters in Whitehawk. They have managed to get local residents and scouts interested in maintaining the 'Chalk Hawk' carving on the hillside in Sheepcote Valley, visible from Wilsons Avenue. Two scouring events have been held to brighten up the figure; hopefully this will be done annually. At a recent workday, a small group managed to refurbish a 'picnic table' where I supplied the missing bolt! These tables and benches are very popular with valley users. Our 'Early Bird Walk' was enjoyed by about a dozen attendees, but birds were a bit elusive as it was too windy.

Springwatch Day, Stanmer Park, was very successful, but the new field layout may have lowered our visitor rate. We provided sunflower seedlings for kids to take for free/donation to which they could add their own-made paper sunflower. We also sold books and oddments to help our finances. Matthew Thomas attended our committee meeting to discuss our joint Management Plan update. We voiced our concerns about Japanese Knotweed, and increasing bramble invasion which has proved very detrimental to sheep grazing. A large group of Travellers invaded East

Brighton Park on two occasions; about 60 caravans were present for 4 to 5 weeks. Some of the recently planted trees were damaged and a huge 'fly-tip' left behind. This year we have noticed a number of abnormal flowers and other flora - this may be partly due to sheep grazing or the unusual climatic conditions? Certainly undergrowth seems to be particularly prolific, unfortunately this includes brambles!

**Stanmer Preservation Society** (PG) – 2010 was the best the three Davidia (Dove or Handkerchief Tree) had been for several years as the wind had held off so their bracts gave a truly magnificent display! I am hoping to put another batch of flora and fauna pictures on the *Citywildlife* site over the next few weeks. Mysteriously, on Stanmer church pond only male mallard and moorhen had been seen and so far no one had found any nests, which was where the females would presumably be? It was hoped to get together with ranger Emma and our SPS secretary soon to finalise a date for the wildlife event 'Recycled Bird Feeders and Bug Houses'.

PG has kindly offered to endeavour to provide a venue for the Local Groups 'get together' next year and suggested May would be the best month, rather than the summer.

**TWEAK** (MW) – Matthew Thomas and Neil Doyle came to our last committee meeting and presented their new Management Plan Template; they are currently collating material that the council has and the TWEACK committee will be working with them over the coming months to produce an effective new plan. This was felt to be appropriate as the existing plan clearly needs updating and improving. In particular the timetable section seems to involve unnecessarily time consuming steps. Originally Management plans for LNRs were produced by the Council not the local groups; perhaps the respective roles need some clarification?

On 23<sup>rd</sup> May we held a very successful dawn chorus walk led by Kim Richards, and on 3<sup>rd</sup> July we have our next Woodland Management Day in the LNR (Withdean Stadium) woods 10.30-1300. We are also planning a bat, moth and BBQ evening on August 11<sup>th</sup> and details will be on [www.tweack.org.uk](http://www.tweack.org.uk)

**riends** (CF) - Our ranger Kim is leaving and this has caused us all great sadness. Already the effects of staff shortages are being felt as two part time rangers have left within six months, both were assigned to us. With the Ranger service already stretched, where will the council find replacements? Kim has arranged voluntary help to maintain paths and clear areas overtaken by dogwood. More positively, volunteers have repaired access steps and a massive bramble bash took place on a sheep grazing field. Delight at seeing a heavy mass of frog and toad spawn in the dewpond was sadly short lived by the continual disturbance of numerous dogs floundering after sticks thrown in by thoughtless owners for retrieval (who wants stinky, muddy dogs in a car?) Our ranger suggested next year sheep enclosed within the pond area may deter loose dogs and prevent this damage.

A nightingale, briefly heard for a second year, obviously failed to attract a mate, but a pair of turtle doves has stayed for several weeks. Many bird boxes have been occupied, mostly with blue and great tits, with up to ten chicks being raised, subsequently ringed by a BTO member. Hugo has assured us that provided jobs undertaken are within our management plan and we have insurance, the council have no objection to us purchasing and using work equipment through the Community Wildlife Lottery Fund Scheme - as access to the council's tools on formal workdays proves more difficult. A draft management plan submitted to Matthew, Hugo and Dave has not been examined in detail yet due to their heavy work loads. Poor quality grassland within the scrub will be mown this year but the arisings not removed -but as these small hillside sites were previously used for agriculture, this should cause little damage.

**Sussex Ornithological Society/ Friends of Wild Park** (PW) - first stage of clearance work on the south facing slope at Wild Park by Brighton & Hove City Council is continuing to raise questions and protest. Most of the opposition seems to come from those who visit the area from Fiveways, Ditchling Road and Hollingbury rather than from Moulsecoomb and Lewes Road, and a meeting at St Matthias Church recently unanimously opposed the plans and asked for the barbed wire fence to be removed. A Review has been requested before any further work takes place.

The large set-aside field just north of Hollingdean, and part of the LNR, was recently invaded by an exceptionally large group of Irish travellers but they were moved on fairly quickly before too much damage could be done! Thankfully skylarks were heard singing afterwards, though it is likely some of their nests would have been destroyed.

**Any other business-** JP mentioned the recent 2010 Sustainability Conference on 'The Evolving Seas' and provided the link: <http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/index.cfm?request=c1209854>

The meeting closed at 9.37pm. We thank Gerald Legg for his contribution of the venue.

**Date of the next meeting** is 7pm, Tuesday, 12th October at the Booth Museum.