

Brighton & Hove's Wildlife Forum

Minutes of October 16th 2018 meeting, held 4.50-6-50pm at the Booth Museum of Natural History

Key actions and summary points

LWS locations are being removed by BHCC in greatly reduced list of recommendations for Local Plan input - Item 2
More recognition needed of seafront hedgerows and esp. Hove Lagoon as a **very** important sparrow habitat - Items 2/9
A Peoples Manifesto for Wildlife, BHWF members should certainly be aware of this national wildlife initiative - Item 4
Useful informative leaflet "House Sparrows and Cats" produced in conjunction with Cats Protection League - Item 5
SPS volunteers monitoring bats using bat detectors- to provide data for Sussex University environmental study - Item 6
Ambitious project being initiated by CPRE Brighton members to both boost numbers and care for City trees - Item 7

Present: *Martin Robinson* (MR) Chairman, & *Dave Bell* (DB), Benfield WCG; *John Patmore* (JP) Brighton Greenway; *Maureen Holt* (MH) – notes, Keep the Ridge Green; *Anne Hyatt* (AH) St. Ann's Well Gardens, *Hazel McKay* (HM) Save Toads Hole Valley; *Mike Parrott* (MP) F.of Bevendean; *Chris Lowe* (CLo), Friends of Queens Park.

Apologies: *Lindy Brooke Tweed* (LBT) Stanmer Preservation Society; *John Cooper* (JC) Sussex Geodiversity Partnership; *Colin Leeves* (CL) KTRG; *Dolly Bell* (DoB) Benfield WCG; *Marcus Oldfield*, TWEACK ; *Stuart Derwent* (SD) Withdean Pk; *Kia Trainor* CPRE Brighton; *Phil Belden*- SWT; *Christine Fitzgerald* (CF) F.of Waterhall; *Gill Taylor* (GT) Hollingbury & Burstead Woods .

1. Chairman's welcome to group representatives and introductions,

2. Minutes of last meeting (17- 07–18) were approved. **Matters arising** included:

(i) JP reported on Local Wildlife Sites (LWS): Contacted Dan Watkins (LWS officer) who said 2013 LWS decisions can not be used in recommendations to BHCC. Possibly wait for a future review. Many LWSs will not be included in the City Plan. This is **highly concerning**, also undemocratic (see below):-

Withdean Park is one of the most important sites not being included as a LWS. It is a large Park which formerly held the National Lilac Collection/ Diverse habitats, mature trees with lichen community. Lies at core of surrounding semi-natural habitats

Of 118 Sites originally selected to become LWSs (using criteria agreed by 2013 Focus Groups) only 62 (**half!**) have been retained at a private meeting of council officers and a Sussex Wildlife Trust contractor, held in April 2018.

This was carried out on behalf of the South Downs National Park Authority but includes sites south of the NPA boundary. It appears they used Sussex-wide criteria, and not Urban- appropriate selection criteria.

In addition to not involving Brighton and Hove stakeholders (such as those at the 2013 meetings) suitable sites missed out five years ago are **still** missing. These include:-

- **St Ann's Wells Gardens** (large mixed habitat Park important for breeding birds and local access to wildlife in Hove)
- **Hove Lagoon** (large house sparrows colony)
- **Longhill Road open space** (confirmed as important for biodiversity in 2015 planning decision)
- **Pavilion Gardens, Brighton** (Central Park with flagship political status, important for dunnocks, demonstrating biodiversity enhancement and local access to wildlife)
- **Valley Gardens, Brighton** (Central high priority site for demonstrating commitment to biodiversity enhancement and local access to wildlife. It extends to The Level and Park Crescent- forming wildlife corridor. White letter hairstreaks thrive in elms there).

If we do not persuade BHCC to ensure the missing LWSs (and LGSs) are included now in the City Plan there is great danger of these sites being inappropriately proposed for property development. Under '*Precautionary Principle*' we do not need to justify each site to NVC level, only to highlight its LOCAL biodiversity importance. The builder's consultant undertakes a full assessment to inform the planning decision (see NPFF + Biodiversity 2010 Strategy)

3. BHCC report – David Larkin did not attend to update meeting.

4. A Peoples Manifesto for Wildlife (JP) Launched by Chris Packham, a National '*Walk for Wildlife*' was held in London on 22nd September. #ThePeoplesManifestoForWildlife was presented to Michael Gove (DEFRA) and MPs are also aware of these intentions,

Ideas are intended to make a difference to wildlife tomorrow –if implemented today. But a warning was given that people are slipping into an ‘*Ecological Apocalypse*’. It aims to co-ordinate actions between many groups and people- so we have a shared agenda.

See: <http://www.chrispackham.co.uk/a-peoples-manifesto-for-wildlife>. * Are there sections we can progress locally?

* Confirm Local MPs commitment to Manifesto for Wildlife

5. Brighton and Hove’s House Sparrows Project (AH) – Surveys -All data from Spring Survey now online (big thanks to Sophie G and Ian B for all their hard work, plus RSPB for use of their mapping system). Data will be passed to Sussex Ornithological Society (www.sos.org.uk) and then to BTO Birdtrack database and various national records. You might like to look at the first map generated from combined data across 2017 and 2018. Please note though, that there were 3 squares for which we sadly did not receive survey data, so we used data from 2015 for completeness. Click here to see map: [Link to Heat Map](#)

We also recently added 2018 survey data to our distribution map. This shows all the sites across the whole city where house sparrows have been reported, plus the results from our city-wide survey done in 2017 and 2018. The area around Withdean stadium is of concern [Distribution Map](#). David Harper, retired lecturer on birds at Sussex University, has been enthusiastic and offered to analyse data.

Our ‘House Sparrows and Cats’ leaflet has been produced as a collaborative project in conjunction with the Cats Protection League, has now been printed at Cats HQ. If you would like one, or perhaps some copies to distribute within your groups please let us know. We plan to make the information available on the Website as well.

Colour Ringing -In the coming winter/spring we hope to start our colour ringing project. This will provide a good way to understand better adult survival and juvenile recruitment, and we understand that house sparrows are a target BTO species for this. The first step will be to find sites with house sparrow colonies where we can set up nets, and where someone is willing to carry out regular re-sighting. If you have a colony on your land and think you might be interested in getting involved, please let us know. It should be very interesting!

Nest Box Building - This autumn and winter we have got a number of nest box building sessions planned. If you know of a community or school group who might like to take part, please let us know. Click here for details: [Nest Box Building](#).

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/bhsparrows>

Twitter https://twitter.com/@BH_Sparrows Email bhsparrows@gmail.com

MR considered congratulations were due to AH for all the excellent hard work that she has put into this project.

6. Local Groups updates – concerns & successes

Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group (DoB) – Scrub clearing is well under way with a good start made whilst the sun shines. The usual rubbish found in the undergrowth - including a nice Champneys bag for your keep fit gear. Butterflies are still on the wing, autumn flowers still out and there are plenty of berries on the trees.

West Hove Golf Course is still having work done on the bund, at last a decision has been made for the bridle path position and work is well in hand. Horse riders regularly use the top footpath on the Reserve, even though they have been asked to stop and the footpath sign is well displayed. Our new management plan is being checked out, much more scrub is on the list for removal, leaving less cover for butterflies, moss, birds and lichen etc, which is a great disappointment as we have kept to HLS guidelines for all these years and felt a good compromise had been made - to the benefit of flora and fauna.

All are welcome to attend our Autumn Talk on Birds by Peter Lovett on 28th November @ 7.30pm at the Oasis Fellowship Church Hall corner of Hangleton Way and Northease Drive. Website: <http://benfieldlnr.tumblr.com/>

Hangleton and Knoll (H & K) Hedgehogs (DB) – The group is still forging ahead with a Deputy Chairman and committee carrying out educational visits and talks. The recently covered Westdene Autumn Fair generated good interest amongst local people. Some special walks are being planned to include local history with two taking place in January and one in February, dates to be advised. All are welcome to attend the AGM of HK Hedgehogs at St Richards Church, Egmont Road, Hove on the 30th November 2018 at 7.00 pm.

Friends of Bevendean Down – (MP) ‘Wilde Bank’ will be this seasons clearing project as it has been so neglected for far too long. The last workday saw a quadrat laid out to monitor flora on established downland turf and a new scrape.

There are cattle grazing on site now as the farmer is using more of his land, it will be interesting to see the results. We have been lucky enough to receive a grant for £300 from the Healthy Neighbourhood Fund.

Friends of Brighton Greenway - (JP) A Workday was held on 7th October. A brief invertebrate survey confirms a diverse community on the wildlife corridor where local plants have been favoured. *Cirsium* maintenance has helped this habitat corridor.

But neighbours are concerned, saying '*the wildlife corridor looks scruffy and supports rats.*' This conflicts with their goal of '*Protecting and restoring land for the benefit of people and wildlife*'

www.BrightonGreenway.uk or on the Twitter page.

Friends of Hollingbury & Burstead Woods – (GT) BHCC has sold the barn that our group had used for its tools since 1991 for an *astonishing* £305,000 so we have been relegated to a metal storage container on the allotments! Since then our numbers have been down, possibly because our volunteers can't find us, or because we no longer have a dedicated publicity officer. At our AGM another long-standing committee member retired and we struggle a bit both with organization and attracting volunteers. Ranger Will Furze arranged for the Community Payback scheme to finish off cutting back dead vegetation on the chalk wildflower banks and we were awarded a Silver Gilt for our work in Hollingbury Woods by the S.E. Britain in Bloom.

Friends of Queens Park (CLO) Drought and falling water levels in the pond was of great concern in August when the deepest part of the pond fell to 30cm. Management of duckweed was also more of a challenge than usual.

Greylag Geese failed to breed successfully but Mallard and Moorhen produced enough offspring to balance the normal 80% losses to Herring Gull predation.

Sparrows with beaks jam-full of glittering damselflies were a reminder in Spring and early Summer of the importance of this 3600 m2 pond as a food supply for insect eating birds and bats. A pair of Mute Swan appears to have established themselves in October (after a 20 year absence).

A scheme involving marginal planting, lilies and a pond dipping platform will go out to tender at the end of October.

Chris sought the advice of the committee between choosing the native water lily *Nymphaea Alba* which mounds up in shallow water or a less vigorous cultivar. The advice was that since the lilies main wildlife function apart from shading, was the provision of shelter for amphibians such as newts, either would be equally beneficial.

Following a public consultation the pond was the preferred choice out of two projects to be given monies from section 106 funding.

Swift Conservation

Swift Conservation.org continued to contribute for a second year to the RSPB survey of Swifts in Brighton. A notable success was the ongoing expansion of a Swift colony nesting in the open eaves of Guinness Trust flats in Whitehawk where the number of observed active nest sites rose from 26 last year to 36 in 2018. However one lady didn't like the 'scratchy' birds and blocked the hole – How do you go about convincing people of their importance?

Friends of St. Ann's Well Gardens – (AH) BHCC have finally completed arrangements for the pond renovation which is up and running. Money has been found for improvement to the Sensory Garden so all is busy and going very well at present. JP commented on a pond there being excellent for liverworts and mosses; he also reminded that despite being eligible for consideration as a LWS (important for birds and public wildlife access) there were currently no plans for this site.

Friends of Withdean Park - (SD) Work Mornings were held in August and September with mixed attendance. The atrocious weather in effect cancelled the one planned for July. *These Friends need encouragement* as it has not been a good time in the delightful Pip Shaw Garden in recent months, i.e. the Pond Garden. It may be recalled that the park seat near the ponds was destroyed by a fire; then the whole litter bin, its contents, and even its concrete base were thrown *yet again* into the pond; and almost beyond belief the purple beech tree we planted in memory of Pip was apparently vandalised and *has completely disappeared!*

However the number of entries for the Groups first "Photographic Competition" has been encouraging, which may be something we can build on. Our next Work Morning is on Sunday 28th October. Absolutely everyone is very welcome!

www.withdeanpark.org.uk.

Friends of Waterhall - (CF) the Green Gym assist by regularly working there to help keep the whole site in order.

Keep the Ridge Green - (MH) at a workday in mid August invasive blackthorn was cleared from around several well grown oaks and two Rowan trees near the café, these had become almost hidden despite being over 5ft. tall—thanks go to Will for speedy clearance of the cuttings. Green Gym have again assisted on two occasions by clearing undergrowth



around the windmill footpath and more recently they were able to plant out 500 primroses in Coney Wood; finance for the purchase of these was kindly donated by Cllr Nick Taylor.

Sheep returned to the ridge this month and as per usual they will graze the site from east to west. Roughly 180 in total, they are expected to be present for around a month and a half.

We await more news from Ranger Will Furze and Alan Griffiths regarding control of the invasive Polygonum creeper (mile a minute plant). Meanwhile it is still flowering merrily all over the top of a large hawthorn! Benches and aluminium information notices on lecterns are now on the list for replacement next year.

Unfortunately the path mowing contractor appears to have forgotten to continue mowing longer grass and brambles towards the garden side and has returned to his original cutting regime out towards the meadow again—despite several reminders.

Save Toads Hole Valley (HM) have nothing to report as yet – but are awaiting planning applications. Kia Trainor (CPRE) has promised her assistance to approach Planners with regard to the LWS and flora/ fauna mitigation.

Stanmer Preservation Society (LBT) – bat survey - volunteers still go out regularly during this mild autumn weather to monitor the bat population in the park using bat detectors, thanks to BHCC Rangers for loaning them to us. This has become more of a “citizen science” project and although fewer bats have been noticed than previously, a more comprehensive update will follow once bats have gone into hibernation and all the information has all been collated. SPS are continuing to link up with the Environmental Biology Department at Sussex University—not only re:bats but also wasps which feature with other species whose habitats may have been compromised by chemical spraying.

Apple Day was a success despite early adverse weather and luckily attendees at the Boundary Festival held in the Nature Reserve cleared up efficiently after themselves.

Interesting historical information on Stanmer Park 1971 – 2007, has just been discovered in a box of approx. 300 slides where the flora of Stanmer feature as the major topic of the collection. A process of digitising them has begun.

Work is ongoing to support John Gapper in the continuation of his wild flower project -although the site location has moved. Funding is being raised for rabbit fencing and a poly tunnel on the newly designated area.

A charity –‘Wild Flower Conservation Society- Brighton and Beyond’, has formed (website being set up). This had a stall at the Wild Chalk Festival in East Brighton Park in July selling wild flower plugs and giving out information on chalk downland plants to provide money. Cash was also raised through a successful open day held at Stanmer Nurseries to advertise the charity and gain support. The well attended event also provided walks to John Gappers nearby wild flower meadow with tea and home made cakes being a popular attraction.

Will Furze (Ranger) reports: hazel coppicing has started up in the Great Wood and is anticipated to be fully finished up by the end of March. Sheep are to return to Marquee Brow in early November and will be grazing the site for around 4-6 weeks, - members of the public will be warned in advance by notices around the site.

A lady has been carrying out a Veteran Tree transect in a section of the park recently, not sure she's picked the best part but still, hopefully we will get a copy of the transect.

The Ranger 'move out' from the nursery is almost complete and we should be in new premises (the old workshop) by the 27th October.

Sussex Geodiversity Partnership (JC) –has through SWT applied to the Rampion Fund for a £9,000 grant to develop their work – more next time. See their website <http://geodiversitysussex.org.uk>

7. CPRE Local Tree Group - This is in the process of being formed by the Brighton Branch and was initiated by Penny Hudd. A meeting has taken place with BHCC arboriculture section and it is hoped to generate interest by local people into planting and maintaining street trees around the city and to locate and care for important existing mature specimens. In addition to providing health benefits, trees both enhance the area and provide majesty. BHWF members could consider extending the concept to include those growing on their open greenspace and to assist in planting more.

8. Planning–(i) (JP) #SaveWhitehawkHill – JP reminded us that the public consultation initiated by Dave Bangs, closes on 24th October. Refer to: <https://www.hyde-housing.co.uk/media/4108/whitehawk-consultation-boards.pdf>

(ii) Remember B & H City Plan Part 2 is being published-

See <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/planning/planning-policy/city-plan-part-two> Copy on our web site, Facebook and Twitter pages.

9. Any other business. (i) JP reported: Shrub 'hedge' pruning along seafront (esp. Cinema to i360) by BHCC. Comments include "this is the weirdest 'hard prune' ever seen; can you do it in sections as the poor birds have so little habitat left on the seafront? And put up some wooden Sparrow Terrace Nest boxes? " The BHCC reply was: Thanks for the lovely suggestion; we've passed it over to the Arboriculture Team for consideration. DB confirmed the shrubby hedge had been severely chopped and was now only 3-6 inches high!

MH visited Hove Lagoon where the wide, woody and spectacular 'sparrow habitat' hedgerow has been halved in places this year - did not understand reasoning behind this as literally 100s of sparrows make their homes there. In addition the grassy bank opposite appears to be in the process of being removed and replaced by aggregate – so another habitat loss.

10. Date of next general meeting- January 15th 2019, General meeting to start at **4.50pm** and finish at **6.50pm**.-However a Committee meeting will precede this – meet at 4pm.

Thanks go to the Booth Museum for kindly providing a venue for the meeting.