



Brighton & Hove City Council

For general release

Meeting: Sustainability Commission

Date: 1st November 2006

Report of: Jenny Rowlands, Director of Environment

Subject: Wildlife Advisory Group: Minutes of 26th September 2006

Ward(s) affected: All

1. Purpose of the report

1.1 To inform the Commission of the minutes of the Wildlife Advisory Group (WAG) meeting of 26th September 2006 (minutes attached in Appendix B).

2. Recommendations

This report is for information only.

3. Background

3.1 The Wildlife Advisory Group (WAG) was established in 1999 to advise the council on the ways that biodiversity conservation can be achieved in Brighton & Hove. On 25th May 2005 the Sustainability Commission resolved to have the minutes of WAG meetings considered at Commission meetings.

3.2 The WAG meeting of 26th September was largely an information sharing occasion and no specific recommendations to the Commission were made. However the minutes of the meeting are attached in Appendix 2 for information.

Meeting/Date	Sustainability Commission / 1 st November 2006
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<p>Financial implications There are no specific financial implications to draw to Members attention <i>Finance Officer consulted: Date:</i></p>
<p>Legal implications There are no specific legal implications to draw to Members attention <i>Lawyer consulted: Date:</i></p>

<p>Corporate/Citywide implications The report describes ways that biodiversity enhancement can be achieved by the council, in accordance with the council's objective of improving quality of life and achieving sustainable development.</p>	<p>Risk assessment No significant risks have been identified.</p>
<p>Sustainability implications Conserving biodiversity is an essential component of sustainable development</p>	<p>Equalities implications No equalities implications have been identified.</p>
<p>Implications for the prevention of crime and disorder There are no known crime and disorder implications.</p>	

<p>Background papers None</p>
<p>Contact Officer Matthew Thomas, Ecologist tel 29-2371</p>

Appendix B

Brighton & Hove Council

Wildlife Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting held 10am Tuesday, 26th September 2006
King's House

Summary of Key Recommendations for the Sustainability Commission

No recommendations were made on this occasion

Present:

Wildlife Advisory Group Members

Angela Marlow (AM)	Sussex Wildlife Trust
Cath Laing (CL)	Sussex Bat Group
Janyis Watson (JW)	Sussex Wildlife Trust (Chair)
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
Phil Belden (PB)	Brighton Urban Wildlife Group

City Council Representatives

Alaric Stride (AS)	Parks Policy Development Officer, B&H Council
Jane Willmott (JW)	Countryside Manager
Matthew Thomas (MT)	Ecologist (minutes)

Apologies

Carole Mortimer (CM)	English Nature
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
Patrick Fitzsimons (PF)	University of Sussex Bat Research Group

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting (26th June 2006)

These were agreed as an accurate record

2. Matters arising from the minutes

Protocol for working with Railtrack

MT: The draft protocol has been forwarded to Network Rail by the Arboriculture Team and the council is awaiting feedback.

Biodiversity Action Plan

JP: Councillor Gill Mitchell has responded to JP's letter regarding the need for additional resources for a Local Biodiversity Action Plan. Her letter says that the council can take no further action until the new national BAP priorities are made public.

Water Action Plan Consultation

MT: The Sustainability Team has been made aware of the WAG's interest. No consultation has taken place to date.

Brighton & Hove Bat Survey

CL: Currently completing grant award forms for equipment. Will report back to a future meeting.

Reporting on Planning applications: Summary table

MT: Please forward comments made on planning applications so that they can be incorporated into a table as discussed at the previous meeting. MT also looking at upgrading CityWildlife to allow local people to report on whether biodiversity planning conditions are being properly implemented.

3. Feedback from Sustainability Commission

Springwatch

The Commission supported continuation of the Brighton & Hove Goes Wild Family Fund Day as a regular annual event.

Cats & Birds Advice Leaflet

MT: The 6th September Commission meeting was divided over whether the benefits from the 'cats and wildlife' leaflet would balance out the costs involved. The text of

the leaflet was endorsed but costs for producing and distributing the leaflet were requested and the WAG was asked to seek external sponsors to finance these costs.

JW: Undertook to investigate the possibility of funding printing of the leaflet.

JP: Stressed the importance of presenting the leaflet as the first of a series.

4. Open Spaces Strategy and proposed Groundwork Trust

AS introduced the 'Parks and Green Spaces Strategy Plan' and 'Action Plan' which had just been published. Rather than being rigidly prescriptive, the new plans establish guiding principles for future open space management. It should be viewed as the start of a process and a statement of intent. Increased focus is given to working with local people and to breaking down the management boundaries between different open space types.

JB asked why allotments had not been included. **AS** explained that to date little strategic work had been carried out on allotments, which needed their own action plan (which is included in the list of actions).

PB asked what opportunities there might be for the WAG to work more closely with Parks officers. **AS** explained that the council has a commitment to produce separate biodiversity action plans for each of its seven candidate Green Flag parks and that advice from the WAG would be welcome on what could be done.

AS undertook to bring a list of nature conservation actions in parks to a future meeting for feedback.

MT: The Strategy does not address the distribution of different types of open space in the urban area and the need to address standards on natural open space provision developed by English Nature. Officers in Policy Planning are working on this as a separate project to inform the Local Development Framework.

Groundwork Trust

AS explained that the council had employed a consultant to carry out a consultation with selected stakeholders on whether a Groundwork Trust should be established in Brighton & Hove. Groundwork has the potential to bring expertise and additional resources to the City. The consultant's final report has just become available which recommends moving forward to 'stage 2' (the development of a detailed business plan). A summary report will be made available to all stakeholders.

PB: Raised concerns about what appeared to be a ‘closed shop’ approach to the consultation. Considering the potential implications of a decision to establish Groundwork, he was surprised a broader and more public consultation had not taken place.

5. Downland Initiative

JW: All WAG members should already have received the final report from the consultants on the Downland Initiative proposals. Their proposals represent a major change in direction for the council over its management of the downland estate and put nature conservation objectives as of the highest priority.

CL: The report sets a positive vision, but the council also needs a ‘road map’ of how to achieve it at landscape scale – perhaps a business plan. The Initiative is a potentially important delivery mechanism for more than one LBAP.

PB: Recent changes in agricultural subsidies provide a mechanism for delivery. In future years tenant farmers will increasingly have to adopt the approach set out in the report to qualify for Government support.

JW: The next job of the Steering Group is to decide how to take the report forward. WAG members are already members of the Steering Group, which will also report back to the full Farms Forum and the Local Access Forum.

6. Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance: Biodiversity

MT introduced the final draft document which has been agreed for formal consultation by Environment Committee. It provides clarity on how biodiversity should be incorporated into development schemes in accordance with national, regional and local planning policy. The formal consultation will commence shortly and all WAG members will be invited to comment.

CL: UK BAP regard Local Development Frameworks as the key tool for local authorities to deliver BAP targets, so the SPD is an important document to get right.

7. Draft Biodiversity Strategy

MT distributed Parts 1 and 2 of the draft Strategy which together comprise the information base that will be used to develop a 'biodiversity vision' for Brighton & Hove for 2026. The Vision will comprise Part 3, with Part 4 being an action plan of how to get there and Part 5 a feedback questionnaire.

JP: Asked for more emphasis on the fundamental importance of biodiversity at the personal level – too much concentration on e.g. 'stimulating economic regeneration' and 'reducing crime' risks missing the values that 'ordinary people' place on biodiversity. The importance of ensuring the executive summary is uplifting and inspirational was also discussed.

MT circulated a Green Network Methodology paper put together for the council by Michelle Thorn of Brighton University. The paper looks specifically at how to establish a functioning green network in existing urban areas and is likely to form the backbone of Part 3 of the Strategy.

Suggested additions or changes to Parts 1 and 2 and comments on Michelle's paper are needed by the end of October. It is intended to bring drafts of Parts 3 and 4 to the next WAG meeting.

MT agreed to obtain and distribute copies of the newly published Sustainable Community Strategy for Brighton and Hove, which includes biodiversity targets and is a great improvement on the original.

Please note: The new Community Strategy is now available on the web at:

<http://www.2020community.org/files/communityStrategy.pdf>

The 'Biodiversity and natural environment' section is on pp40-41. It includes a commitment to producing a LBAP. Hard copies available on request.

8. Election of new Chair

JW: The WAG constitution requires the election of a new Chair once a year. **CL** has been nominated and has agreed to the nomination.

CL was unanimously elected as Chair, with **JP** to support as vice-Chair for a second year. **JW** was thanked for her work in steering the Group through the past year.

9. Planning application updates

MT briefly reviewed 3 recent planning applications with biodiversity implications:

06/02260 Moulescoomb Campus: The development is adjacent to Brighton University SNCI (Watts Bank). Planning conditions prevent any impact on the SNCI. An opportunity has arisen to require conservation management of the SNCI by the University as part of a legal agreement attached to the planning permission. MT to talk to DS about the details of the content of the agreement.

06/02427 Highcroft Villas: New development proposal for the old allotment land behind the Booth Museum. Catherine Cole aware. Difficult to object to on nature conservation grounds within current planning policy guidance, although further work needed on Slow Worm translocation proposals. Typical of the kind of undervalued urban wildspace which has come under increasing development pressure in recent years.

06/02072 Marine Drive: Proposal to build 'Earthships' on the old horse paddock behind Brighton Marina. Owned by the council which is actively marketing it for development. This application includes various habitat creation proposals which could benefit local wildlife although some details, such as choice of species, are rather eccentric.

There was some discussion over whether the density of the Earthship development was too low and whether the land should be put to better use to help meet housing figures. Some WAG members supported the view that creating some low density housing in urban areas was good to provide relief from higher density areas.

The biodiversity implications of the 'i360' planning application were also raised. The original Environmental Statement had failed to mention impacts on the marine interest of the West Pier wreckage to be removed, but this had subsequently been rectified. EN had discounted any major concerns over effects on Peregrine (wind turbine blades).

10. AOB

JW: Questioned whether paper copies of all reports to WAG need to be produced – Powerpoint presentations would be an alternative. After discussion it was agreed to continue with paper, but produce fewer copies.

MR: Concerned about council grass mowing which has caused problems at Green Ridge and scalped verges in the Portslade area this year. AS explained that short cutting was not in the contract this late in the year and that an error must have been made.

AM: Raised concerns about proposals to build a new car park in Preston Park. AS: The car park for disabled badge holders was still at the discussion stage and there would be a wide discussion of the issues with stakeholders before any decisions are taken.

MH: Front gardens at Green Ridge are disappearing under off-road car parking – needs control.

MT: 'Brighton & Hove Building Green' held its second meeting (at the Hedgehogs development in Bevendean) last Tuesday. The informal group aims to advise the council and the public on green roofs, green walls and other innovative biodiversity on buildings ideas. Several people with expertise in this field happen to live in the Brighton & Hove area.

11. Date of Next Meeting

7pm, Tuesday, 12th December, The Booth Museum
(please note change of date due to venue availability)

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

