

BRACKNELL FOREST BIODIVERSITY FORUM MEETING
Thursday 22nd September 2011
South Hill Park



Present: Marlies Boydell (MB) Bracknell Forest Council
Gill Cheetham (GC) Bracknell Forest Natural History Society
Gill Martin (GM) Bracknell Horticultural Association
Marjorie Trendall (MT) Crowthorne Natural History Group
Cllr Carole Cupper (CC) Sandhurst Town Council
Barbara Jerome (BJ) Bracknell Conservation Volunteers
Rachel Francis (RF) Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust
Paul Craven (PC) Winkfield Parish Council
Cllr Adrienne Jones (AJ) Bracknell Town Council
Diane Collins (DC) St Michael & Mary Magdalene Church

Apologies: Allan Moffat (AM) Bracknell Town Council
Cllr Catherine Menon (CM) Warfield Parish Council
Cllr Gail Robertson Crowthorne Parish Council
Claire Wallen Warfield Environmental Group
Brian Clews (BC) County Ornithological Services
Kelly Thomas (KT) Berkshire Nature Conservation Forum
Mike Withers (MW)
John Baster (JB) Crowthorne Village Action Group/Crowthorne Ancient Tree Hunt

1. Introductions

2. Minutes of previous meeting

Bagshot Road Site – MB explained that the verge could not be officially be changed to a wildflower verge with a single cut due to the safety restrictions on cutting times. However, despite the mid-season cut the wildflowers seem to be doing well.

Tree Planting Policy Letter – MB confirmed that the Council does not have a budget for replanting trees. It would be most effective if the Natural History Society send a letter separate from the Forum requesting replanting. The new Biodiversity Action Plan could include replanting in order to provide stronger support and better chance of funding. MB also suggested that voluntary groups could be more involved in the replanting as the main cost is around the watering and upkeep after the planting. Perhaps we could include “Adopt a Tree” where local people agree to maintain a tree to help it establish.

Swift Monitoring / Owl Box – MB has been in touch with the Wildlife Trust with regard to Chawridge Bank – where two Barn Owl boxes will be installed. Sites need to be well away from major roads as studies have shown that 80% of Barn Owls encounters with roads end in death. **MB to write a letter to the owners of Foliejon Park as it may be possible to have boxes installed there.** Another place to consider is Binfield Manor, however the owners are difficult to contact. Ascot Place already has boxes installed. **There is an owl box at Lily Hill Park, MB to see if this can be used.** AJ will contact Ascot Priory to see if it may be possible to have some installed.

MB requested will follow up on the Mapping System for PC.

PC to provide the Winkfield tree records of where trees once the mapping has been received.

AJ suggested she might be able to speak to someone at Ascot Priory about allowing access to survey ancient trees.

3. Summer 2011 news round-up from local groups

CC

- Dog walkers display – “Poo Fairy” posters worked well. CC is investigating the hire of a Dog Costume for future events.
- Has been informed by the Sandhurst Residents Association (SRA) that the Balancing Pond belongs to Thames Water and they (Thames Water) had undertaken some not very successful tree work on the island recently.
- There was a photographic exhibition of wildlife photos including insects and wildlife.
- A bluebell walk has been planted near the Balancing Pond.

BJ

- The whole of the Bracknell Conservation Volunteers are very annoyed about a safety issue with the coppicing of the trees at Northerams Wood. There must be experience coppicers that undertake this activity. BJ recently had a tree fall on her by someone who is experienced - this activity should not include children. **MB is taking this very seriously and will speak to Marie-Anne Phillips about managing the risk at upcoming events at Northerams Wood and Jocks Lane.**
- The forum should be reconnecting the public with nature in connection with bees. There are wildflowers in the Town Centre and we have the Biodiversity butterfly signposts around the area. BJ feels that more wildflowers should be grown on the verges around the borough. MB stated that we are increasing the use of wildflowers across all of our sites and that we need new ways of engaging with people. GC mentioned that it is difficult to recruit volunteers and AJ mentioned that as a local resident she had not received a copy of the Northerams newsletter. CC suggested that BJ organises some talks to interested people at Sandhurst. **MB to get in contact with the University of the Third Age (U3A) in Bracknell and Sandhurst, and the local Living Churchyard Group at St Michael & Mary Magdalene Church DC to do this). MB to consider how we get better communication and connections into the next plan.**

GC

- The Bracknell Horticultural Association will be holding a produce and plant sale in the town centre on 22nd October. There will be prizes for the biggest marrow and pumpkin. The group are still looking for members.

GM

- The Allsmoor Lane project is at a complete standstill, it's looking worse and no one appears to be taking responsibility for it. In the meantime the Natural History Society is working on a woodland garden at Lily Hill Park with Steve Chown.
- In relation to bees the proposed community garden at Jealotts Hill is in difficulties mainly because access to the Syngenta site is problematic and transport would be required as in a rural location. Syngenta are partners of Operation Bumble Bee so could be encouraged to include. Councillor Michael Sargeant is a bee keeper in his spare time, although it is unclear if he is part of a local group. **MB to contact Cllr Sargeant and talk to Graham Pockett as he is involved in the Syngenta Community Garden project.**

Following the meeting, Claire Wallen of the Warfield Environment Group added:

I am also involved in the Syngenta project (on steering committee representing Warfield Grow and Share group) so if you need any representation re bees or anything for the site I may be able to help here as well as Graham. I would also like to see some wildflower belts on site but as it is early days have not suggested where this could be done. There is loads of space so I am sure we could have a small meadow.

- The programme of upcoming Natural History Society meetings has been added to the forum website.

PC

- During surveys in April a great crested newt was found at Tows Bourne Pond. It was found that one of the neighbouring properties was pumping water out of pond into the pond within their own property, they have been told to stop. The water level is higher now; another survey will be undertaken next spring.

DC

- The group recently held a bat walk at Mill Lane and were hoping to see some Noctules but these proved to be elusive, however, they did find Pipistrelle and Daubenton's.
- They have recorded 18 Red Campions in the churchyard and will hopefully have more next year. They are monitoring Devil's Scabious but the main priority is to keep the churchyard as an area of biodiversity.

AJ

- Bracknell Town Council has now appointed the environmental officer. CC asked that arrangements could be made for Sandhurst Town Council to pay into this facility.
- Bracknell may have a possible Gold in the Britain in Bloom awards.
- The Northerams Wood project will involve coppicing.
- (BJ) Bracknell Conservation Volunteers will be clearing the pond and install stag beetle loggeries.

MT

- Crowthorne Natural History Group have arranged to visit the British Wildlife Centre at Linfield on 1st November, there is one place left which she would like to offer to any interested member of the team the ticket price is £13.00.
- St Johns Parish Church in Crowthorne has been severely cutting back patches of wildflowers and grasses. The person who manages the churchyard wants it to be very neat, but MT feels that patches of wildflowers and grasses need to be kept. There were Slow worms at this site, but the habitat has gone. **AJ suggested talking to Councillor Bob Wade and MF agreed to try this.** MT asked if there is a website that could send her some literature that she could circulate. **RF to send some churchyard information to MT.**

RF

- BBOWT are building an education centre at their Maidenhead office which will hopefully open Easter 2012. They have recently appointed an education manager to target the whole borough with lottery funded transport to the centre to link with local schools.
- It has been a good year for Silver Studded Blue Butterflies at Broadmoor Bottom and Wildmoor Heath.
- Kelly Thomas Berks BAP officer would like biodiversity to be connected better with businesses and the public. Berkshire Nature Conservation Forum has applied for funding to become a Local Nature Partnership and will hopefully get the results shortly.

- BBOWT are running the Dorothy Morley Conservation Awards next year for community group led wildlife projects, and would like to advertise the awards in local groups. **RF to e-mail the forum some publicity in November.**

GM

- The group has received an e-mail from the BBC looking for local volunteers who are “experts” in their field. GM will forward the e-mail to the whole forum. **MB will send e-mail to forum explaining how to send a note to the group via the website when sending the minutes.**

MB

- Bio Blitz at Northerams Woods in June – 150 different species were recorded. Unfortunately attendance was poor and there was a lot of effort and planning involved.
- Glow Worm / Nightjar walk at Wildmoor Heath was successful.
- Two bat walks were held at Lily Hill Park and Northerams Woods a Noctule was foraging at Northerams.
- A new pond at School Hill was created by Bracknell Conservation Volunteers.
- Photo competition “Trees and Routes” the deadline for entries is 30th September. A few members of the forum were unaware of the competition.
- There will be another Northerams Wood newsletter produced next month.
- The council has trialled the planting of Sunflowers at Larks Hill in the arable field to attract bees in the growing season and birds in the autumn and winter.
- MB has visited three local schools to look at their wildlife areas and give advice.
- South Hill Park, Northerams Wood and Lily Hill Park all have wildflower sites that will have seed sown as enhancement. CC advised that there may be a suitable site in Sandhurst. PC asked if MB had any wildflower seed that he could have. **MB to send out information on wildflower creation and work with partners to identify and plan projects that could be included in new BAP.**
- The woodland area at South Hill Park has been divided into sections with Laurel and Rhododendron to be removed to allow native understorey re-growth. Some replanting of native understorey is also planned. **DC to mention that the Gladstone’s Oak looks unhealthy at the next Friends of South Hill Park Grounds meeting.**
- Species rich grassland is in decline and MB encouraged group to e-mail her some ideas to improve this.

BJ mentioned that MB and the rangers should get together to agree what projects need to be done with safety coming first.

The Crown Estate will be clearing 100 hectares of Rhododendrons in Swinley Forest Estate this winter. They are also planning a replanting programme in conjunction with the Forestry Commission, which is to include more fire breaks that could provide more open habitats, although bracken is common in these areas.

There are 10 new ponds in Crowthorne woods (DC asked if a map of these is available as she would like one), **MB to find out for reporting on BAP.**

4. Biodiversity Action Plan

4.1 Progress on targets

At the beginning of the meeting MB stuck a map of the borough on the wall for the group to see. The idea of this map is to mark where work is happening, how would this be best

used? MB has requested a list of Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs) from the Record Office. Currently these are Thames Basin Heath, Chawridge Bank, Binfield Woodlands, Windsor Great Park and Blackwater Valley. These are biodiversity hotspots where conservation would have most benefit. If we undertake work in any of these areas we could get more funding.

MB would like to compare where the habitats were in 2006 and where they are now as part of the new BAP.

BAP may now include a green infrastructure project; potentially the council might pay for this. GM asked for maps to show areas mentioned in the plan.

Questionnaires should still be sent to MB, as she will try and include these responses even after the deadline. **MB to e-mail Richard Aylesbury (BCV) a copy of the questionnaire.**

MB asked the Forum if they have any ideas on how to make the plan more interesting to read as it is a bit "dry".

4.2 Ideas for the new BAP 2012-2016

MB aims to finish the old plan review by end of November 2011.

There will be a public consultation of the new plan in January for 6 weeks which we are looking to adopt in April 2012.

MB would like the groups to feedback if the targets are unachievable.

RF has had comments from a developer that the birds in Swinley Park are not important. But is aware that the RSPB may include this as a site of interest – could this be added to the BAP?

MB suggested that the next plan needs to be simplified, and envisages that habitats are represented by 2 or 3 key species, the criteria at the moment is that they are of conservation concern, of local importance, identifiable and representative. We are already quite strong on birds. Fungi need to be identifiable etc on deadwood **MB to send out BAP criteria to the forum.**

MB encouraged any comments on the old plan:

DC there are masses of Ragged Robin and different ages of willow at South Hill Park, the willow needs to be treated due to its re-growth potential. **DC to bring it up at Friends of South Hill Park Grounds meeting.**

5. AOB

CC The planning application at Broadmoor – additional housing will impact Crowthorne more than Sandhurst. The new hospital will be built and a wall constructed before moving patients, but there are problems with regard to the old building as it is listed. A new access road will be constructed and there are concerns around the parking as the hospital will charge staff to park. MB stated that this application is very complex and no residential buildings are allowed within 400m of the SPA. At the moment the application is specifically for the hospital not for housing. In theory Broadmoor Farm will be a SANG.

Both MB and RF have concerns with the access road; their gut feeling is that it will involve a large construction for relatively small need. The old building is not practical as a hospital, one of the current proposals is to change its use to a hotel.

AJ Are the council going to be involved in planting woodland for the Queen's Jubilee? Perhaps a line of trees somewhere – there must be a road which could have trees? MB mentioned there is a hill at Jennet's Park which will have native oak planted around one side but otherwise it's difficult to find sites. **Action for All to suggest sites for tree planting to mark Queen's Jubilee.** AJ asked about the re-seeding of the wood at Allsmoor Lane. MB explained this has happened naturally and is the responsibility of the landowner who was prosecuted for felling TPO trees.

Following the meeting, Claire Wallen of the Warfield Environment Group added:
Jubilee tree planting – we would like to have at least one good specimen oak to plant at Priory Field (obviously not on the pitches). This was suggested by the RHS as the area is very open and boring and it would be a good legacy for a relatively new community space.

MB Has received an offer from the Forestry Commission to come and talk to the groups about the fire. **MB to e-mail the forum the contact details.**

6. Date of next meeting

To be confirmed in December for a date in February.