



# Rottingdean Parish Council

Parish Clerk Chris Hayes Tel: 07547 017 969

## **Minutes of The Beacon Hill Nature Reserve Stewardship Group's Annual General Meeting held on Friday 11 September 2020**

Present: Cllr Sue John (Chair) (SJ), Cllr Louise Arnold (LA), Cllr Bernard Turnbull (BT), Bernadette Skinner (BS), Cllr Joanna Davies,(JD) Nick Lane (City Parks Ranger) (NL), Bob Webzell (BW).

Chris Hayes, Rottingdean Parish Clerk (minutes)

Minutes of Annual General Meeting held on 13 September 2019

1. The minutes were agreed.

Matters Arising

2. None

Report on the 2019/20 Management Plan

3. The Friends of Beacon Hill reflect ed on the last year:

- The annual pattern of work, that involved 'bashing' the scrubs during October to February and tending the woods and paths from April through May and June, had been severely hampered because of Covid 19 related restrictions;
- There had not been the usual sheep grazing in the autumn
- One of the key inhibitors had been the City Council's policy on volunteers that did not allow people in at-risk groups, such as people over 70 years of age, to volunteer.
- JD enquired if individuals could sign a waiver but NH said that BHCC were following Government guidelines that did not allow waivers.

4. NL reported progress since he took up the post of Ranger In December 2019:
- 2 new notice boards had been installed and the 2 final boards would be put in place when Covid 19 restrictions allowed;
  - This process had been complicated by the need for an archaeological dig;
  - He was looking at the policy on volunteers which at the moment was set at a level 3 safety requirement which meant that it was not possible for him to work with more than a single volunteer;
  - The Spring grazing started in April using 6 grazing areas. He was giving thought to whether this could be rationalised
  - The option of permanent fencing around grazing areas was also being considered;
  - The sheep were due to return soon and graze through the autumn - signs would be placed on the notice boards.

5. The following points were made in discussion:

- The hinge on St Dunstan's gate required replacement and in the longer term the gate would require substantive repair;
- JD asked when the remaining notice boards would be fitted. NL said this required getting together a number of Rangers to assist, which would delay progress;
- LA suggested that the former golf course grazing area needed two separate grazing areas as the path across the area, which was well used, was covered in sheep dropping;
- BS asked if the path to St Dunstan's could be cut back and if a temporary fence could be put around the dew pond, where there were protected flowers, and the burial ground. JD suggested a sign could be put up in the interim.
- BT said the gate next to the Beacon Hill entrance had bolts missing something NL said he was aware of and was investigating.
- SJ asked if NL could lobby the City Council to ease their volunteering policy
- JD asked for an update on tree planting. LA said some remained to be planted but under the current circumstances timing was uncertain.

6. NL said he would take away all the issues raised but doubted if anything could be done on volunteering since BHCC remained liable for the health and wellbeing of anyone they agreed could do voluntary work with them.

## Report of our Specialists on 2019/20

7. Peter Whitcomb had been unable to attend the meeting but had provided reports for the Annual Newsletter. His contributions were greatly appreciated.

## The 2020/21 Management Plan

8. NL said this was not yet completed but a key priority was to establish more permanent grazing arrangements and in the longer term set up 3 larger grazing areas. He would organise a discussion when the thinking had crystallised.

## The 2020/21 Proposed List of Projects

9. Jo Spickett had circulated an outline work plan which was seasonally led – see attached. BT said that a priority was to improve accessibility around the Hub entrance and thought was being given to how this might be done. SJ said that in the circumstances the work plan would need to remain in abeyance,

## Beacon Hub Financial Report

10. BT reported that Beacon Hub had continued to pursue their aims and objectives in difficult circumstances.
  - They remained focussed on creating an eco-educational facility located in a building suitable for large classes of children, adult recreational activities and social gatherings.
  - Fundraising had been dedicated to replacing the current building with a space suited to a range of activities and would include a 35 seater classroom. Although pledged funding had reached £165k, the quotations to demolish and rebuild were more than £225k. In view of this planning was now underway to retain the existing building but add on a temporary classroom constructed using similar materials. A planning application is being developed.
  - Current restrictions had led to the cancellation of all activities although the building had been hired out for 1 to 1 activities in keeping with the Charity's aims and objectives. Currently the room is being used on week days for well-being activities.
  - The cafe kiosk and the car park had been reopened which had been well received, particularly in supporting the open days at the Windmill.
  - A decision had been made to charge for the use of the car park. It would be free for the first hour to accommodate the needs of local residents, then possibly £2 per hour for the next 2 hours and £5 for a day which would run from 9.30am to 5pm. The plan was evolving and so comments would be welcome.
11. BT reported that the Charity remained financially sound. Although expenditure exceeded income in 2019, as a consequence of employing professional support to assist planning decisions, the position had reversed during 2020. Through a combination of cafe takings, donations, hire of rooms and car park charges income had exceeded expenditure with a reserve and funds to contribute toward the proposed building. As a result of a partnership with the Co-op these funds would

increase during this year. All the accounts and report submissions for the Charity Commission had been prepared ready for the submission deadline of 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020.

12. As the constitution allowed for a rotation of the Chair, BT had stood down and been replaced by Atlanta Cook. Graham Beaver, Trustee and Treasurer had resigned and BT had taken over the Treasurer role. A new trustee had joined, Jess Bavinton, who brought with her a wealth of experience in environmental issues, including the development and implementation of Plastic Free Ovingdean

13. SJ congratulated the Hub on its flexibility during this challenging year.

### The 2019/20 Annual Wildlife Report

14. Peter Whitcomb was submitting a number of reports - see attached. BW said he could provide photographs.

15. Submissions for the Annual Report should be sent in to **CH** by the end of October along with photographs. The Chair and Clerk would liaise to arrange desktop publishing and the print run. Thanks were recorded to BW for previous production of the Report over many years. It was agreed that Bob would pass a set of recent previous reports to SJ to be filed at The Keep.

### Any Other Business.

16. None

### Date of the Annual Clean-up

17. The annual clean was planned for the 13<sup>th</sup> or 23<sup>rd</sup> October but efforts would be hampered by the restrictions on volunteering. NL said there could be no officially organised cleaning up, perhaps a notice in the Rottingdean Village News could make a similar plea for support. SJ said she would see what could be done.

18. NL said that he had been impressed with the informal litter notices that had been placed on the notice board and in the longer term wanted to engage with local community about posters and signage. In the meantime he would need to take the informal notices down to make room for official ones. The meeting recorded its thanks to Georgina for her artwork.

19. The Date of the next meeting was set for **10 September 2021**

## BHNR WORK PLAN 2020/2021

### Site Overview

Beacon Hill is a wildflower rich chalk downland with a deciduous woodland strip to the eastern side. Chalk downland is a type of calcareous grassland that has declined by over 80% since the 1940s. Calcareous grassland is a mosaic habitat consisting of prominently flower rich grassy areas, sparsely interspersed with scrub (which includes shrub species like hawthorn, elder and rose along with the scrubby species like bramble). Calcareous grasslands supports a wide range of wildlife, including many bees and butterflies and of note for Beacon Hill, a breeding population of ground nesting skylarks, a species of high conservation priority.

### Aims of the work plan activities

- 1) Conserve and preserve the chalk grassland mosaic habitat.
- 2) Improve biodiversity in the woodland and woodland edge habitat.
- 3) Improve access and infrastructure.

### Work plan activities 2020/2021

Activity	Location
BH01 – Removal of Shrub scrub	Section/Sections tbc
BH02 – Removal of encroaching bramble	Section/Sections tbc
BH03 – Management of bramble patches	Section/Sections tbc
BH05 – Hoary Cress management	Section/Sections tbc
BH04 – Ragwort Pulling	Section/Sections tbc
<i>Infrastruture projects i.e. repair to steps</i>	Woodland entrance to recreation ground.

## **Butterfly Report for Beacon Hill LNR 2020**

By Peter Whitcomb

There has never been a year like this and with the outbreak of Coronavirus through March and April UK Butterflies called off all transect counts. With some relaxation of Government guidelines it wasn't until mid-May that counts were resumed. Normal counting would have been from 1 April, this meant losing six weeks. In actual fact some of the April counts would have been quite high as for once there was a spell of hot weather.

On the plus side the species that did well were Marbled White with a max count of 104 on 24 June, Gatekeeper and Small Heath. Large White and Common Blue had a better year but were still a little below average. Hovering around average were Small Skipper, Dark Green Fritillary and Wall Brown.

Missing the first six recording weeks would have increased the chances of higher counts on some of the early fliers. In fact there were no Speckled Wood or Brimstone recorded even though they have a second flight period. Once again some of the larger butterfly species fared poorly with very low numbers of Comma, Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell. Red Admiral too, but with a few weeks to go the final aggregate could improve as this species fly well into October. It was disappointing not to record Ringlet and Painted Lady this year. I saw no Clouded Yellow either, but one was seen on the Hill on 4 September.

A possible sighting of a Green Hairstreak on 9 April would be a first for the Reserve.

Blue butterflies are a feature of chalk grassland and although Common Blues had a better year the other species could do with some encouragement. In the past we have recorded small numbers of Adonis, Chalk Hill and Small Blue and they require certain larval foodplants for their survival. Beacon Hill could certainly do with some seeds or plug plants of Horseshoe Vetch and Kidney Vetch or better still a properly created butterfly bank which B&HCC have successfully placed elsewhere in the Brighton area.

## **Moths and Miscellaneous 2020**

Very few moths were positively identified during the year. A Mother Shipton was seen in May and there were a number of sightings of Yellow Shell. A Hummingbird Hawkmoth was seen in June and a caterpillar of Six-spot Burnet was found at the end of June. Cinnabar caterpillars were feeding on Ragwort in July but very few of the moths were seen. The first Six-spot Burnet moths were seen on 4 July, with max 18 on 11 July and continued to be seen in decent numbers until early August. I managed to secure a person willing to set up moth traps on the Hill, but owing to the pandemic this did not materialise. Hopefully something will take place next year.

There was a good number of miscellaneous sightings with at least six species of Bumblebee noted, included a possible rare Brown banded Carder Bee seen by Libby Darling on 13 June. Other insects included Hoverflies (*Scaeva pyrastris* etc), a Yellow Dung Fly and Cockchafer, and various Grasshoppers. Numerous St Mark's Flies were encountered towards the end of April. On 14 May the quaintly named Fire streaked Bugkin was found – a first for the Reserve. A Common Darter dragonfly was hawking along the woodland edge on 30 August. Other species reported were a Weasel in April and a Stoat in May. Foxes, Grey Squirrels and Badgers are present but not reported. A Wasp Spider was seen on 18 August.