

UK Urban Ecology Forum (UKUEF)
Draft minutes of the meeting held at The Linnean Society of London
Wednesday September 11th 2019

Present

John Box (JB)	Unaffiliated
Mark Champion (MC)	Lancashire Wildlife Trust
Ian Douglas (ID)	University of Manchester
Paul Evans (PE)	Freelance writer and broadcaster
Pete Frost (PF)	Natural Resources Wales
Jane Houghton (JH)	Natural England
David Goode (DG)	University College London
David Haley (DH)	Artist and Educator
Nigel Lawson (NL) (Hon. Sec.)	University of Manchester
Sarah Lindley (SL)	University of Manchester
Judy Ling Wong (JLW)	Black Environment Network
Alison Millward (AM)	Alison Millward Associates
Terry Robinson (TR)	Outdoor Recreation Network
Elizabeth Rollinson (ER)	Linnean Society
Alan Scott (AS)	Complete Ecology
Richard Scott (RS) (Chair)	Eden Project
Joanne Tippett	University of Manchester

Apologies

Samantha Davenport, Paul Evans, Mathew Frith, Nick Grayson, John Handley, Philip James, Kerry Morrison, Peter Massini, Paul Nolan, Julie Proctor, Joe Ravetz,

Minutes of meeting held April 30th 2019

The minutes were accepted

Chair's opening remarks

- RS thanked ER and the Linnean Society for hosting this meeting
- JB outlined the advantages in members of UKUEF also joining the Linnean Society and ER invited members to do so.
- RS thanked JLW for attending the UN-Habitat GFS meeting and congratulated her on doing a great job and in helping to re-assert the forum into a new era.
- RS thanked AM for assembling the case study slides for the UN-Habitat GFS meeting in Nairobi and several were used. These case studies provide insight into UKUEF member's activities. All members are encouraged to provide further case studies.
- NL requested short CVs from all members who have not already submitted them. These CVs are important in order to demonstrate the substance and range of expertise within the Forum and it was agreed to put them on the Forum's web site.

ACTIONS

- **Additional case studies to AM and NL (see template and guidance note attached)**
- **Short CV's (if not already submitted) to NL**

Actions from the meeting held April 30th 2019

Dealt with in agenda items below.

UN-Habitat First Global Stakeholder Forum in Nairobi

JLW reported on her attendance of behalf of UKUEF at UN-Habitat's First Global Stakeholder (GSF) Forum in Nairobi May 25th and 26th; provided excerpts from GSF Declaration and details of the structure and the strategy of UN-Habitat and of the GSF. (JLW's presentation and additional notes have been circulated to members separately)

She outlined the New Urban Agenda which embodies three guiding principles:

- Leave no-one behind, ensure urban equity and eradicate poverty
- Achieve sustainability, urban prosperity and opportunities for all
- Foster ecological and resilient cities and human settlements.

She then discussed the development of the UKUEF's work programme with UN-Habitat and outlined potential categories to which members could contribute:

- Work relating to our membership of the GSF Global Stakeholders Forum – contribution of nature-based solutions and people-based solutions to foster ecological and resilient cities and human settlements. The present temporary framework for participation is through joining one of the General Assembly of Partners (GAP) 16 Constituent Groups. See <http://generalassemblyofpartners.org> It is proposed that we join the Professionals Group to provide us with a starting point within the developing framework.

Action: Join one of the General Assembly of Partners (GAP) 16 Constituent Groups.

- Work relating to a contribution to the New Urban Agenda (NUA) commitment within the UK.

Action: PF and JH have been tasked with looking into the range of activities DEFRA and others may be involved in under NUA, and who the lead persons may be at country level

- Work relating to NUA internationally - and exploration of how to link directly into the UN Habitat Assembly Strategic Plan, identify partners. Any other work theme that UEF wants to influence or contribute to in the UK, drawing on the diverse strengths of the Forum.

Action: UEF members who wish to do this should name their working themes to facilitate progress and work programme identification.

She further proposed potential participation of UKUEF at the World Urban Forum (WUF) meeting in Abu Dhabi 8-13 Feb 2020 where Joe Ravetz will be running a workshop for his PERI-CENE (Peri Urbanization and climate-environmental change) project- see <https://co-evolutionary.com/peri-cene-project/>

Discussion focused on the difficulty in assessing where we best fit in and on which of the GAP groups would be most appropriate for UKUEF. JLW advised that we can only join one group but pointed out that the structure is still being formulated and we are in a position to potentially influence it. Noting that little seemed to be said about ecology and the environment, that the most appropriate group for UKUEF would be 'Professionals' and that we should propose a sub-grouping on 'Ecology'.

Further discussion included the need to communicate with other like-minded groups across the world (such as for example David Maddox's Nature of Cities- see <https://www.thenatureofcities.com/author/davidmaddox/>) and encourage them to work with us to get UKUEF philosophy established within UN-Habitat; the need for UKUEF to be represented at WUF 10 in Abu Dhabi and the potential benefits of association with the UN Department of Public Information (DPI)- see <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2013/09/dpi-department-of-public-information/>
To be properly associated with UN-Habitat we need to demonstrate work undertaken by UKUEF.

The important thing will be to balance our own aspiration of UN recognition pragmatically, and getting the best from the connection as a member of first the UN Habitat Assembly.

ACTIONS

- **Work programme to contribute to the Global Stakeholder Forum (GSF). JLW to propose actions by individual members.**
- **Work Programme to contribute the New Urban Agenda (NUA). JLW to propose actions by individual members.**
- **Participation at WUF in Abu Dhabi 8-13 February 2020**
- **Consideration of "Association" status with UN Department of Public Engagement (DPI)**
- **It was agreed to post a statement association on the UN Habitat, as agreed in terms of our Stakeholder Status with assembly, and RS to send this to Graham for posting.**

UN-Habitat Assembly GSF launch event

ER confirmed the Linnean Society's willingness to host this event. The Linnean Society can offer a meeting room for up to 130 participants or their wonderful library for up to 80 participants and video facilities. She intimated that room costs would be waved, that catering for a day-time event might be about £15 per head (more for an evening event) plus some additional staffing costs and possible key speaker's expenses.

Consideration needs to be given to the size and shape of event; for whom; whom we wish to influence, and the take-home messages the event would have.

Discussion included stakeholder representation and participation; incorporation of the Routledge Handbook on Urban Ecology launch; an artistic event; feedback on WUF Abu Dhabi; and clarity on what we wish to do and wish to achieve. SL proposed stakeholder mapping via a social network analysis to help illustrate scope, gaps and gatekeepers.

It was decided to work towards holding a day-time event autumn 2020.

ACTIONS

- **ID to contact Routledge re launch of the Urban Ecology Handbook**
- **All members to give consideration to the above and feed detailed ideas and proposals to NL for discussion at the next and future meetings.**

UK UNESCO MAB Committee

It was agreed that the Forum's channels linking to UNESCO committees should be kept open.

Urban Ecology Manifesto/Charter/Principles/Name

DH explained that he considers the potential for the manifesto to be a dynamic, living document and that it could include wording for UN-Habitat and be useful at WUF Abu Dhabi. It will help to explain who we are, what we do, with whom we can do it, who it is for and those who might benefit from it, such as Government, Local Authorities, NGOs and local urban ecology and climate change interest groups and practitioners. It should be trialed on UKUEF members.

ACTION: DH to circulate the latest version of the manifesto to members for comments.

Draft National Framework of Green Infrastructure Standards

JH explained that Green Infrastructure Standards are a feature of the 25 year Environment Plan and that elements of it could feed into UKUEF's manifesto.

The purpose is to find a practical framework of Green Infrastructure (GI) standards. It will review the evidence and existing standards and analyse drivers of change. It includes barriers to GI, opportunities for GI, structured guidance and benchmarks.

Her presentation has been forwarded to members.

Work Programme

The work programme relating to UN-Habitat is outlined above. RS spoke of problems associated with urban soils and substrates.

JB referred to his proposal made prior to the meeting that the Forum provide sound advice about a) [adaptation for the increasing effects](#) of the rapidly changing climate and b) create clear narratives to explain why the climate crisis is critical to our future.

Also prior to the meeting PF, supported by JB, proposed that through our link to UN-Habitat we could offer our expertise to help develop a proposed International Standard for Urban Resilience.

RS reported that he attended a CIEEM special Interest Group meeting in Chesterfield in May, and one of the strong and possible items related to the call for an abandonment of topsoil on public landscape schemes which had biodiversity objectives, to ensure biodiversity and save carbon miles thus presenting an opportunity for the Forum to highlight creative urban substrates, with for example carbon capture benefits. There will be a CIEEM call to progress an original draft prepared by RS. This importantly also links to finding ways to linking to the energy connected to wilding/rewilding, that in many ways retraces the observations and campaigns of the original urban wildlife movement in the late 70's/early 80's, and its enthusiasm to place the benefit of urban nature into real focus, and policy concern.

[Appendix 1](#) below is RS's draft proposal to the Landscape Institute, IEMA and CIRIA for collaboration with CIEEM, to develop "Guidance on the Use and Misuse of Topsoil in Habitat Creation and Green Infrastructure"

ACTIONS

- **RS to provide an outline for work by the Forum on urban soils and substrates**
- **PF and JB to develop an outline proposal on International Standards for Urban Resilience and invite members to contribute.**

JB referred to his proposal made prior to the meeting in which he made two specific suggestions for the Forum: a) Provide sound advice about adaptation for the increasing effects of the rapidly changing climate; and b) Create clear narratives to explain why the climate crisis is critical to our future. Therefore, the climate crisis in urban areas must be woven into all our actions.

Treasurer's report and financial planning

NL reported that the bank balance at 10th September was £2453 with an outstanding liability of £108 due to Concurrent Solutions for hosting the web site in 2018 and 2019. Projected income is currently NIL.

NL also pointed out that whilst hosting meetings at University of Manchester is the most cost effective at about £100 – £200 as against circa £450 - £500 in London, the evidence of today is that attendance in London is superior.

In discussion RS reported that he was in the process of formally approaching Esme Fairburn and DH suggested that the Paul Hamlyn and Helen Hamlyn Trusts might be interested in supporting the Forum in the longer term.

ACTIONS

- **RS to proceed with an application for financial support from Esme Fairburn**
- **DH to approach the Paul Hamlyn and Helen Hamlyn Trusts**

Nature of Cities Summit Paris: Wilding and Rewilding and how this links to the urban experience

RS attended this event, as did Pete Frost. RS also attended rewilding conferences in both Cambridge and Chesterfield during which the importance the experience holds for critical people as well as cultural connections was emphasized. The experience of members of UKUEF is directly relevant to funders such as Esme Fairbairn.

Membership

The following had applied for membership of UKUEF and their applications and CV were circulated to members in advance of the meeting:

- Blanche Cameron proposed by Richard Scott
- John Little proposed by Richard Scott
- Victoria Sherwin proposed by Judy Ling Wong
- Danielle Sinnett proposed by Ian Douglas
- Vincent Walsh proposed by David Haley
- Tim Webb proposed by Judy Ling Wong
- Phil Wheeler proposed by David Haley
- Niall Williams proposed by Judy Ling Wong

All eight applicants were seconded by members present at the meeting and all applicants were duly elected as members of UK Urban Ecology Forum.

NL reported that he had received resignations from Graham Leeks (retirement from CEH and David Knight (change of role at NE) and that he had written to both expressing the Forum's thanks for their contributions over many years and best wishes for their futures.

ACTION: NL to write all newly elected members.

Awards

It was agreed to postpone discussion on the award process and how to take it forward until a future meeting.

Web site

NL reported that despite his retirement from University of Manchester Graham Bowden has agreed to update the site for us. It was agreed that he should be paid ex gratia about £100 or £200 more or less annually for this service.

Graham had in the past recommended upgrading the site 'into the 21st C'. An additional advantage thereof would be the ability to provide a link other than the the current 'UK MAB Urban Forum'. Graham has confirmed that he would undertake this work for us for £300 and his proposal is below in [Appendix 2](#).

In discussion it was felt that the price was more than reasonable and that we should proceed with this work as soon as finances allowed.

ACTION: NL to liaise with Graham Bowden.

Any other business

DH reported [his involvement in the VIEWPOINT Project](#) at the confluence of the Cocker and Derwent rivers in Cockermouth, Cumbria has concluded with the installation of twelve, locally repurposed rocks with Haiku poems, inspired by Wordsworth and a two-year dialogue with townsfolk and others. The Project Film, produced by Signal Films of Barrow-in-Furness tells the story: signalfilmmedia.com/viewpoint/ His chapter in the recently published book, *Along Ecological Lines*, provides further insights into this project at <https://www.cornerhousepublications.org/publications/along-ecological-lines/> . In addition David and Vincent Walsh (New Member) have continued their co-authorship enterprise (initiated by Ian Douglas), in a series of articles for NEW FOOD magazine, starting with, *How can agroforestry help support the climate agenda?*

<https://www.newfoodmagazine.com/article/94301/how-can-agroforestry-help-support-the-climate-agenda/>

AM noted that the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust would be 40 years old in 2020 and that several other early urban nature conservation groups would be celebrating a similar anniversary at around the same time - Avon Wildlife Trust, London Wildlife Trust, Landlife, Sheffield and more. UEF might take the lead in bringing representatives from these groups together in 202/21 to reminisce, gain some perspective on achievements and celebrate! AM will be happy to coordinate but would appreciate some help with ideas and scoping.

RS reported that he had met with the Chief Executive of Doncaster City Council and that Doncaster, would be interested in hosting an Arts and Ecology event into which the Forum could link.

ACTIONS:

- **RS to follow up with Doncaster City Council**
- **AM to follow up with The Wildlife Trusts**

Date and location of next meeting

Judy Proctor of SNH had intimated the possibility of holding a meeting in Edinburgh. NL mentioned that whilst this is desirable it should perhaps be delayed until our financial situation is more secure.

JH kindly offered to host the next meeting at NE in London towards the end of November and her invitation was accepted with thanks.

- **Next meeting: November 20th 2019 at Natural England London.**

Appendix 1

DRAFT

Proposal to the Landscape Institute, IEMA and CIRIA for collaboration with CIEEM, to develop “Guidance on the Use and Misuse of Topsoil in Habitat Creation and Green Infrastructure”

A recent CIEEM meeting in Chesterfield in June 2019 reviewed 40 years of wildflower and meadow grassland restoration and creation throughout the UK. It was concluded that one of the key constraints on species-rich habitat creation was the inappropriate use of ‘topsoil’, which is usually too fertile and often of dubious quality.

CIEEM is keen to promote the use of appropriate soil-forming materials and avoidance of the inappropriate use of fertile topsoil in public landscapes and green infrastructure in which the delivery of biodiversity objectives is required. This should not only have cost advantages in times of squeezed budgets, but be beneficial in creating sustainable conservation landscapes with higher biodiversity value.

This is entirely consistent with the Lawton Report’s (*Making Space for Nature*, 2010) call to create bigger, better, more and joined-up habitat and landscape areas in order to reverse the continuing loss of biodiversity and improve our urban and rural landscapes for the benefit of people and wildlife. It is also a critical step towards achieving the aims of the UK Government’s 25 Year *Environment Plan* (2018), which emphasises the need to restore, create and encourage more biodiverse habitats.

The starting point and most critical decision of any landscape or habitat creation project is usually the soil and sowing/planting medium, whether this is ameliorated natural materials or blended soil-forming material. This is often underplayed in public landscape schemes and can often be the greatest single hindrance to delivering landscape scale change for biodiversity. Using good quality, fertile and often expensive topsoil can have a significant negative impact when biodiversity outcomes are an important objective.

Topsoil is a precious resource and has its place, of course, so it should be reserved for important and localised productive uses such as horticultural production and more formal or recreational landscapes. It should not be wasted on inappropriate uses where soil forming materials such as creative recycled substrates should be used in preference and are not only more economical but give better outcomes for biodiversity.

BS3882 Topsoil (2015) is a useful standard and now covers multi-purpose topsoil. However, its application for non-productive uses is limited even though the 2015 revision includes guidance on low-fertility soils. It does not provide sufficient guidance on the use of soil forming materials for a wide range of habitat types.

An example of an application which relies on standard specifications for topsoil is Highway verges. These are often dominated by a few competitive species and expensive wildflower seed mixtures will not be sustainable over time, public resources will have been wasted and standards and targets will have less likelihood of success. Also mixtures that are over-prominent in grass are counter-productive, especially sown on fertile soil.

As ecology and landscape professionals we should be more adept at utilising subsoils novel and waste materials to create soil materials that are better suited to biodiversity, demonstrating creative conservation, best resource use and community delivery. Techniques such as soil inversion (listed in the UK's response to the *Global Plant Strategy* (Plantlife/JNCC 2004) and Defra funded national trials have demonstrated this nationally.

Examples of road verges which have adopted a subsoil philosophy successfully have and stood the test of time include the M40, A55 Flint Bypass, Stansted Airport, Knowsley Expressway, Weymouth By Pass, the new A30 Link Road in St. Austell and the legacy of environmental charity Landlife (now held as the NWC with the Eden project). A topsoil stripped meadow in the heart of a Knowsley Council estate has stood this test of 26 years, one of the best created grasslands in the UK, delivered with minimal management. Similarly soil inversion at Preese Heath in Shropshire have turned a potato field into a best practice heathland and explosion of silver studded blue butterflies.

The opportunity to deliver high aspirations for biodiversity is now critical and needs to be applied urgently. Responsible use of topsoil should be an important part of this. CIEEM believes that the Landscape Institute, IEMA and CIRIA could build on recent successes in collaborating on delivering Biodiversity Net Gain, and should now work together to promote good practice by jointly developing a coherent pathway to give local authorities, landscape delivery agents and landscape/ecology professionals the lead on this issue.

CIEEM would welcome the opportunity to form a collaborative working group to scope, develop and deliver appropriate guidance.

Draft 2.1 for discussion, prepared by Richard Scott (National Wildflower Centre, Eden Project) and CIEEM Ecological Restoration and Habitat Creation Special Interest Group, September 2019.

Appendix 2

Outline proposal for an updated website for the UK Urban Ecology Forum

A scaleable, responsive website for the future

Current problem

The current website is of a dated static design created ten years ago on a basic Windows hosting package.

It is not a responsive site and does not view well on current mobile technology

The domain name is legacy

Proposed solution

Move to a new hosting company on a linux server

New domain name

Benefits

A move to a content management system (CMS) like Wordpress or Joomla.

These have the facility to allow additional content managers with fewer technical skills to manage the site should the need arise

A website that is scaleable. Ease to which additional interactive elements can be 'plugged in' such as blogs, polls, calendars, galleries, form data collection and interactive forums

A responsive and accessible design

A password protected area for members only

Specific email accounts and distribution list facility

Budget

Hosting package (yearly).....***£54 to £72** (depending on bandwidth and disk space). The price includes the domain name which is renewable every two years at ***£14**

Recommended hosting company [UK Web.Solutions Direct Ltd](#)

G Bowden's time to set up and maintain the site.....**£300**

*Prices as May 2018