



The UK Man and the Biosphere Committee Urban Forum

Minutes of the UK MAB Urban Forum meeting held 7th March 2006 at Tapton Hall, University of Sheffield.

Present

Gerald Dawe	(GD)	Independent consultant, and Chair, Urban Forum
Jane Fisher	(JF)	CEH Wallingford, and Secretary, Urban Forum
Peter Frost	(PF)	Countryside Council for Wales
David Nicholson-Lord	(DNL)	Independent consultant
Peter Cush	(PC)	Environment and Heritage Service, N.Ireland
David Knight	(DK)	English Nature
Peter Morgan	(PM)	Groundwork UK
Peter Shirley	(PS)	West Midlands Wildlife Trusts
David Goode	(DG)	University College London (DG: formerly Greater London Assembly)
Ian Douglas	(ID)	University of Manchester
Penny Angold	(PA)	Independent consultant
Grant Luscombe	(GL)	Landlife
Scott Ferguson	(SF)	Scottish Natural Heritage (on behalf of Ian Angus)
Eilidh Johnson	(EJ)	Greenspace Scotland (on behalf of Julie Proctor)
Ian Rotherham	(IR)	Speaker – Sheffield Hallam University
Ken Thompson	(KT)	Speaker – Sheffield University
Alison Loram	(AL)	Visitor - Sheffield University
George Barker	(GB)	Recipient of UNESCO MAB UK award

1. Apologies and Welcome

Apologies have been received from Alan Scott, Peter Jarvis, Mathew Frith and Judy Ling Wong. Ian Angus and Julie Proctor have apologised and sent representatives in their absence.

GD welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially George Barker.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the December 2005 meeting were signed by GD as an accurate record.

3. Matters arising from minutes

DG said that the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution Report is complete and he is grateful to Urban Forum members for their assistance. If members have anything else of interest can they send it to DG asap, by 21/3/2006 at the latest.

4. Presentation: Dr Ian Rotherham (Reader, Sheffield Hallam), ‘Ecology and Natural History of Sheffield’.

Dr Ian Rotherham summarised the changes in natural history brought about by agriculture and industry and the spatial distribution of habitats related to green wedges, areas of upland and river corridors within Sheffield. Large areas of wetland, which up until the 1950s frequently flooded residential areas and were important habitats, have been lost. Rivers became heavily polluted from Sheffield’s industry, but are now much cleaner. IR also summarised the rich diversity in flora and fauna in Sheffield and described the change in species brought about by the introduction of invasive species. The importance of former industrial sites, such as collieries, were highlighted as areas of high diversity and refuge for some BAP species.

Discussion: GL asked whether exotic species are only undesirable if they replace native species, such as the Crayfish. DNL noted that there had been a fluctuation in conservation activists with their being more volunteering in the 1970s, and less in the 1980s and 90s. Discussion on the fact that students now are less likely to volunteer or become activists as they are working to pay off debts. DG noted that there seemed to be a loss of natural history knowledge, but an increase in resources and environmental management training.

5. Presentation: Ken Thompson (Senior Lecturer, Sheffield), Author of ‘No Nettles Required’ Eden Project Books.

Ken Thompson summarized some of the outcomes of the Biodiversity in Urban Gardens (BUGS) project. BUGS 1 crystallized some wildlife gardening ideas from evidence. Species diversity was found to be unrelated to garden age, size or location and lots of species do better in gardens than in rural areas. A seminal work tracking the biodiversity in an Urban Garden over many years is “The ecology of a garden” by Jennifer Owens.

BUGS showed that invertebrate diversity could be increased by having dead wood such as long piles. Invertebrates are the basis of the biodiversity of other fauna in gardens, especially birds, and therefore invertebrate biomass and diversity is especially important. Many gardeners, however, do not want to attract plant eating invertebrates! BUGS also found that invertebrates showed no preference for indigenous plant species over exotic plant species.

The urban environments, especially the garden, are where most people first experience wildlife and engage with the world around them.

There is a strong edge effect on diversity. For example, where a path meets lawn or gravel or where a lawn meets bare earth. The differences in temperature and moisture here attract different invertebrates.

Discussion: DG noted that much of this information on native and non-native species is out of sync with preserved conservation wisdom. Bird diversity in a London study showed that this was related to garden structure, eg: shrubs and trees, and not to the presence of native or non-native plant species. PS suggested that it was, however,

important to consider the effects of exotic plants on such things as water resources considering their different water requirements.

Alison Loram, postdoctoral research assistant, has been working on BUGS2 –mapping floral species in London, Belfast, Cardiff and Oxford.

6. George Barker: Presentation of MAB award.

A UK MAB Urban Wildlife award was given to George Barker in recognition of his outstanding contribution to Urban Wildlife Conservation. This was accompanied by tributes paid by David Knight on behalf of English Nature, Peter Cush for N. Ireland’s Environment and Heritage Service, Peter Frost for the Countryside Council for Wales, and David Goode, Grant Luscombe, Gerald Dawe and Peter Shirley.

7. International Urban Ecology Seminar

Deferred due to lack of time.

8. Health and the Urban Environment workshop

GD passed round draft plans for the workshop which were then discussed. PF felt that there should be more interaction perhaps through workshops or discussion groups. This was supported by GL and DNL who suggested the timetable was altered so that presentation duration was shortened to 20 minutes to allow more time for discussion and the inclusion of more case studies. After discussion, 25 minute-slots were agreed on.

DK brought along a copy of the new Audit Commission report “Enhancing Urban Green Space”. EJ described two Greenspace projects 1) Impact of neighbourhood renewal on health and 2) A MRC study into barrier to the use of greenspaces and offered to provide speakers from these studies for the workshop. PM – suggested Dr William Bird as a health professional speaker but it was suggested by DK that as the issues are generally accepted that the focus should now be on case studies and methods of implementation. DNL noted that it may be an opportunity to invite representatives from DEFRA or the Department of Health to discuss how to turn scientific evidence into political/government practice. There was a general discussion led by PC, ID and PA on the necessity to define the workshop audience and outputs. GL said there was a need to present the negative impacts of greenspaces as well and PM suggested including a study in childhood play and suggested Tim Gill as a speaker. Meanwhile DNL suggested several speakers from the development and planning side.

Much discussion took place. It is summarised below:

Comment by:	Regarding:	Action taken by Forum:
ID	What are the aims of the meeting? Is it: to get together: a) urban greenspace professionals; and b) medical / environmental health professionals With the aim of exploring barriers for the successful expansion of the health / urban greenspace agenda	General agreement

PA	Is the aim of the meeting: a) to formalise formal prescriptions for health and the urban environment; or b) to act as a discussion, ideas or networking event	It was agreed that the meeting could not offer definitive prescriptions. (Not an academic colloquium, it would be more of a workshop.) Its real aim was to fit into the latter category.
DNL	The aim should be to see: What works? and What doesn't? and translate that into practice	Noted
DK	Should get a friendly developer involved. Possibly via Chris Baines. Crest Nicholson was mentioned. Possibly need to move beyond William Bird / CABE Space Andrew Mawn and the Association of Public Health Authorities could prove useful. What evidence needed to be put forward to about housing and open space to engage health professionals? FAB Greenspace and MRC project could be of potential interest.	Noted
Eilidh Johnston Scott Ferguson / PM	Mentioned the Glasgow Centre for Population Health – urban and rural studies longevity, 10 years plus, mainly mental health. The work was very rigorous and linked into urban renewal.	Agreed that we need a speaker from GCPH
GL	Tim Gill / Children's Greenspace could prove relevant	Noted. Of potential interest.
PC	Epi-genes and open space could imply that the meeting should be given over to the medical profession, and their findings CAA County Access Activities could prove relevant. There were senior civil service personnel involved. The Forestry Commission person in the UK, Helen Townsend could prove useful.	Noted

It was agreed that GD would re-draft the workshop agenda with assistance from ID and DNL. DK and PF to be kept in the loop as it progresses.

Action 8.1: GD to redraft the agenda for the Health and Urban Environment Workshop and to send round to UF members before next meeting.

9. Progress on the Work Programme

ID has been working on Response of Urban Pest Species to Climate Change. He also discussed with GD whether to publish the Health and Wellbeing paper as an Urban Forum paper.

Action 9.1: JF to update the Urban Forum website

10. Update/Discussion on Centre for Ecology and Hydrology restructuring

JF summarised the restructuring plans for CEH. The NERC intention is to close five of the nine sites with a loss of 200 jobs. During the consultation period NERC had been surprised by the level of feeling after receiving over 1,300 submissions in favour of the current CEH structure. The final NERC decision is to be announced on 15th March 2006.

[NB: The final NERC intention was announced on 14/3/06. They intend to proceed with the plan to close five CEH sites including Dorset, Monks-Wood, Banchory and

Oxford, with the loss of 160 jobs. Details on the science areas to be retained, reduced or stopped are now also available.]

11. Any Other Business

PS announced his retirement from the Wildlife Trusts and from the Urban Forum. He will be retiring on April 21st after 15 years of being a member of the Urban Forum including time as secretary and vice-Chair. PS said that being a member of the Urban Forum had been a valuable role during his career.

JF will be leaving CEH in June and therefore standing down as secretary to the Urban Forum.

12. Dates of Next Meetings

To be held in Edinburgh in May. Dates between 15-19th May or earlier were suggested. Venues were suggested by Greenspace Scotland.