

**Minutes of the UK MAB Urban Forum meeting held 11th July 2011 at NE,
 London.**

1. Present

Ian Douglas	(ID)	University of Manchester (Chair)
Mathew Frith	(MF)	London Wildlife Trust
John Handley	(JH)	University of Manchester
Jane Houghton	(JH)	Natural England
Nigel Lawson	(NL)	University of Manchester (Secretary)
Alison Millward	(AM)	Independent Consultant
Chris Nevin	(CN)	Scottish Natural Heritage
Terry Robinson	(TR)	Independent Consultant
Richard Scott	(RS)	Landlife
Peter Shirley.	(PS)	Forum Fellow
Judy Ling Wong	(JLW)	Black Environment Network

Participation by telephone link

Peter Frost	(PF)	Countryside Council for Wales
Philip James	(PJ)	University of Salford

Participation by invitation

Paul Nolan	(PN)	Merseyside Forest
Linda Philips	(LP)	Roots and Shoots
David Perkins	(DP)	Roots and Shoots
Tim Sutherland	(TS)	Natural England

2. Apologies

John Box, Ambra Burls, Peter Cush, Gerald Dawe, Samantha Lyme, Julie Proctor, Joe Ravetz, Joanne Tippett

3. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes were approved.

4. Matters arising

Outstanding actions from the last meeting were reviewed:

- A1 Request for publications for the Forum web site: NL to write to members who have not yet responded. **A1**
- A2 Forum archives: NL pointed out that they are currently stored in his garage and thus both 'in the way' and not particularly secure. They should, if possible, (with the exception of the last 10 years), be lodged at a suitable university or other appropriate institution. ID undertook to contact John Ryland Library at

University of Manchester. DG undertook to pursue possible inclusion of the archives in a proposed urban ecology collection in the library retention of the Linnean Society **A2**

- A3 Nomination of Buglife's legal process for UK MAB Urban Forum Award for Excellence. Buglife have again expressed a desire to be considered for this award and ID undertook to respond to them. AM has sent ID the e-mail concerning progress so far. **A3**
- A4 News is awaited from UNESCO on the the proposal to aim for Biosphere reserve Status for the Lower Thames Estuary. JH to follow this up **A4**
- A5 Review of the Forum accounts on an annual basis on behalf of the Secretariat: ID to investigate. **A5**
- A6 is an agenda item and is dealt with below
- A7 SCOPE/UNESCO project on urban areas of less than 1 million people: ID is awaiting news from SCOPE, UNESCO and the Chinese Academy of Science's Experts Group and will thereafter develop a framework on the topic on how the Forum might respond and be involved. **A6**
- A8 to A11 are agenda items and are dealt with below
- A12 ID will approach the Co-op Bank regarding a reprint of Discover Yourself Outside **A7**.
- A13 publicity for the Handbook on Urban Ecology by the IEEM: this item is dropped.
- A14 No feedback has been received from DG and this item is dropped
- A15 is an agenda item and are dealt with below
- A16 London Wildlife Trust's 30th anniversary programme is evolving and MF will advise on how the Forum might become involved **A8**.
- A17 to A22 are agenda items and are dealt with below.

5. Presentation 'The Genecon system for quantifying the benefits of urban greenspace'. Paul Nolan, Mersey Forest.

PN pointed out how the debate on urban environments is changing and that green infrastructure is no longer just an amenity but is now becoming a necessity. How this is communicated is important and the Gencon system is a prototype in adding monetary cost/benefit value assessment to traditional qualitative and quantitative assessments. Discussion centred on the value of this approach, the challenge in providing robust data, ease of use and how the Forum might become involved in taking this forward.

6. Presentation 'Changes in garden structure in London between 1998-9 and 2006-7, a brief insight' Mathew Frith

MF pointed out the importance of gardens for urban biodiversity but that even in London little was known about them and the extent to which their composition is changing prior to the London Wildlife Trust's 2010 study "London: Garden City?". Principal findings are that approximately 24% (37,900 ha) of Greater London is comprised of private, domestic garden land but that overall vegetation in gardens decreased by 12% (3,000 ha) between 1998-99 and 2006-7. Discussion focused on how these changes are taking place below the planning radar, the influence on certain TV gardening programmes on gardener's behaviour and on the potential impact of these changes on resilience to climate change and excessive run-off.

7. Presentation of the UK MAB Urban Wildlife Award for Excellence to *Roots and Shoots* and presentation of their work by *David Perkins*

JLW presented David Perkins with the UK MAB Urban Wildlife Award for Excellence for Roots and Shoots in recognition of their work on awareness building and the development of the relationship of people towards nature and urban wildlife. David Perkins gave a brief presentation showing both how Roots and Shoots had converted an old contaminated land site into an urban garden and developed a wide range of courses for the public.

8. Conferences:

- a. Planet Under Pressure, London March 2012. A Forum led session. ID reported that there had been an exceptionally high demand to host sessions at this conference and the Forum's proposal had been unsuccessful. Members are however invited to submit abstracts for inclusion in other sessions- see <http://www.planetunderpressure2012.net/>
- b. PS advised of his involvement as an expert advisor to the EPSRC's Sustainable Urban Environments (SUE) programme. PS offered to prepare a short summary of this programme for the Forum which was accepted with thanks. **A9**

9. Greenspaces Toolbox: A methodology for assessing the extent, the quality and the appropriateness of urban greenspace on a given topic area. *Update on the work of the sub group by Pete Frost/Ambra Burls*

PF felt that whilst the Forum had pioneered accessible natural greenspace toolkits it now lacks the resources to develop others and that the proposal to develop the Greenspaces Toolbox was now proving to be beyond the current scope of the Forum. PF therefore suggested that the Forum should seek to provide leadership in bringing people who are active in this field together in a workshop sometime in the future. This suggestion was supported by PJ. Discussion included the need to build on the work of the National Ecosystems Assessment Group and the need to get them more involved in urban ecosystems (JH and PF), the need to map out the 'state of play' in this field at present (AM) and to consider how our workshop could make a mark in this field (ID). JH offered to get an update on what is happening in this field **A10**
PJ offered to take this forward and, as a first step he, PF and ID agreed to either meet or have a telephone conference on July 15th **A11**

10 All-Party Parliamentary Groups possibly interested in urban green space- *potential for the Forum to establish communication with relevant groups.*

A brochure outlining the Forum's constitution, aims and activities has been produced and ID and NL will now include it in a letter to all secretaries of key groups to raise awareness of the Forum's work. **A12**

11. Response to the Defra Independent Panel on Forestry in England and proposed "City people and their forests and woodlands".

PS and TR had provided ID with input who undertook to take this forward on behalf of the Forum by starting work on a leaflet. MF pointed out the need to include Local Authority forests and AM undertook to circulate an economic valuation of woodlands in the Black Country. **A13**

12. Training Sessions for RTPI

AM reported that this item is ongoing and that AM, AB, JH and JT are taking this forward. [A14](#)

13. Green Veins' linking the arts with urban greenspace issues. *Report by Alison Millward*

AM will talk to Celia Spouncer about how the Forum might engage with artists and forge links with the public arts community for the benefit of urban ecology [A15](#) and PJ will also explore this subject with his artist student Kerry Morrison [A16](#) with the objective of inviting both to attend the meeting of the Forum in Manchester provisionally scheduled to be held on January 18th 2012 in Manchester

14. Biosphere reserves.

PF reported on Brighton's application to become a Biosphere Reserve now focused on the green infrastructure around the city. He also advised that he had attended a meeting of EuroMAB which now has a working group on urban issues. He also advised that AB is involved in talks at the conceptual stage on a EuroMAB group on health issues.

15. Urban Greening and Future Water for Towns and Cities.

A discussion paper prepared by ID and NL on this potential topic for the Forum to input into in the future which had been circulated to members prior to this meeting was favourably received by the meeting. Discussion covered how to persuade practitioners, the need to take note of a good case study undertaken in Glasgow and the Clyde Valley, the use of groundwater and novel ways of urban water retention.

It was agreed that NL and ID would investigate the possibility of the Forum holding a conference or a workshop on this topic under the UNESCO label and who might be invited to attend such an event [A17](#).

16. Membership

ID welcomed new members Terry Robinson and Chris Nevin to the Forum.

17. Awards

- a) Olympic Parklands and John Hopkins- *request by Jacqui Sterne (NE)*.
It had previously been agreed that this application was premature and Jacqui Sterne has been advised accordingly.
- b) Chorlton Water Park (re-assessment)- *recommendation for award*.
Members felt that re-assessing sites which had already received the award was akin to awarding a green flag and was inappropriate. It was therefore decided that since Chorlton Water Park had not actually sought the re-assessment but that this was undertaken on the initiative of Forum members, it was more appropriate to issue them with a certificate of ongoing recognition. NL/ID to organise the presentation of a suitably worded certificate [A18](#).
- c) Wigan Greenheart- *progress with application*
The assessment is progressing.
- d) Other sites and matters concerning the Award- *request for nominations*
Members are requested to nominate potential recipients.
JLW proposed Leicester's 'Eco House'. PS offered to be an assessor and NL and ID undertook to make a preliminary investigation of this site's suitability [A19](#).

AM proposed the “Black Country Living Landscapes Community Involvement Programme” and undertook to make a preliminary investigation. **A20**.

JLW felt that it is important that the awards are used to raise the profile of both the recipient and of the Forum. PS felt that networking among recipients should be encouraged. This might be achieved via a ‘blog’/recipients network (somewhat analogous to the “Project Dirt” blog: <http://projectdirt.com/>). There should also be links to award recipients on the Forum’s web site. NL to investigate this with Graham Bowden **A21**.

18. Work programme and annual report: Secretary

The 2011/12 work programme and the 2010/11 Annual Report have been distributed to members and are on the Forum’s web site.

19. Funding Options

ID suggested that members could potentially use the Forum’s broad expertise and act as expert panel members or advisors to funded projects. The point was made that due to liability considerations this type of activity might have to take place in an individual capacity rather than an activity of the Forum. ID undertook to investigate how members might become involved in paid advice work. **A22**.

20. Financial report: Secretary

NL reported that the contribution of £500 from CCW for 2011/12 has been received. The bank balance at 11th July 2011 is £4,281. After outstanding liabilities (expenses to a member, preparation and printing of the brochure and flyer for EuroMAB, award plaque and expenses for to-day’s meeting the net assets (reserves) of the Forum will be in the order of £3,250. NL pointed out that the Forum’s expenses are currently exceeding the Forum’s sole source of income of £500 per annum from CCW and that approximately £1,500 of the reserves emanate from the profit made by the ‘Do Street Trees Have a Future’ conference. PF reported that the EuroMAB brochure had been distributed to every MAB National Committee and to UNESCO’s Vienna and Paris officers.

21. Any Other Business

There was no other business

22. Dates of future meetings

- On a Tuesday/Wednesday or Wednesday/Thursday slot between 27th Sept and 23rd October at Natural England, London. This meeting is being arranged to coincide with NE’s training events to which all members are invited to participate and of which JH will be sending out details shortly **A23**.
- 18th January 2012 at University of Manchester.