

BRAES OF THE CARSE CONSERVATION GROUP

BRAES OF THE CARSE ANNUAL REPORT 2020

Due to COVID it is not possible to hold a BCCG AGM this year, so we have decided to put together a brief report of the things that have kept BCCG Committee members busy during this past year.

Walking and Cycling Routes – and other road related issues.

I contacted PKC in February 2020 to ask about the next tranche of Walking and Cycling Roads in our area. I received a response in July to say that the routes planned for 2020/2021 had been postponed due to COVID, as resources had been directed to the Spaces for People physical distancing measures (as needed due to COVID).

The proposed Walking and Cycling routes included:-

Horn – reduction of the 40mph speed limit to 30mph
Westown – extension of 40mph Green Route
Horn to Grange – introduction of a 40mph limit
St Madoes to Inchyra – introduction of a 40mph limit
North Carse Green Route – upgrade 40mph repeater signs

You will see that some of these routes are not immediately in our Braes of the Carse area, but for our cyclists these proposed extensions will be much appreciated.

PKC say that work on these routes will resume as soon as possible.

Following the above response from PKC, combined with contact from Local Councillor Angus Forbes regarding the proposed 20mph limit on the Upper Carse Road, we emailed members and asked for feed back on these proposals, plus any other comments on roads, traffic safety, walking, cycling etc. We co-ordinated the feedback and wrote to the Traffic and Network Manager of PKC summarising our members concerns and suggestions. To date we have not had a response, in spite of a follow up letter.

As mentioned in more detail in Alison Ramsay's report on Planning Matters, some members have expressed concern over the impact of traffic volume on the roads in the Sidlaws, with the Cross Tay Link Road (CTLR) terminating at Scone. Unfortunately PKC did not make any adjustments to their plans to terminate the CTLR at Scone.

Christine Hall

Report on Planning Matters

BCCG is involved in planning matters in our area in 2 ways. Firstly we comment on strategic planning matters and secondly we support our members in relation to specific contentious planning applications lodged in respect of potential development sites within our area.

Strategic planning issues

At the 2019 AGM I reported to you on the comments that BCCG had submitted to PKC earlier last year when they were reviewing the Housing in the Countryside Guidance. We had said that we understood and accepted the reasoning behind the principle of not identifying settlement boundaries for the smallest settlements but were concerned that unless the terms of the Housing in the Countryside guidance were consistently and rigorously applied there would be a risk of ongoing creeping expansion of rural small settlements, ribbon development outwith any existing "natural" settlement boundary and further suburbanisation of the countryside.

We mentioned 3 main areas of concern

1. Building Groups

We were concerned at the fairly widespread practice of artificially creating a potential “site” in an otherwise open field or other land in the hope of it being treated as part of a “building group”. We wanted it made absolutely clear that an attempt to artificially create a landscape framework by the subdivision of a field or other land whether by the erection of a fence or the planting of trees or hedging would not be sufficient to secure the grant of planning.

2. Redundant farm buildings

We were concerned by the interpretation of when a building was “redundant” for agricultural purposes. The push by developers to purchase farm sheds for development was putting pressure on the future sustainability of agriculture in Perthshire as farming businesses could not compete with the monetary value offered by developers for the opportunity of replacing a perfectly serviceable agricultural shed with numerous houses. We felt that the potential for this pressure could be excluded if the purchase of actively used farm buildings with a view to leaving them unused and thus “redundant” no longer qualified the building as “redundant” i.e. “constructive redundancy” would not be permitted.

3. Protection of Orchards

We wished to see some protection from development for land on which there were fruit orchards, orchards being of particular historical and cultural importance in the Carse of Gowrie, a haven for wildlife and contributed hugely to biodiversity.

We also enquired about the possibility of Tree Preservation Orders being put on historic orchards if not otherwise protected by planning legislation.

I am delighted to report that our comments were taken on board by PKC and the Housing in the Countryside Guide March 2020 now includes specific provisions that directly deal with our concerns.

1 and 3. Regarding building groups it is now specifically stated:

“Fencing or young trees or hedging planted with the specific intention of creating a site will not be accepted as existing landscape features for the purposes of this Supplementary Guidance, nor will the felling of an area of woodland or orchard specifically to create a site”. The definition of ribbon development was also clarified and expanded.

2 Regarding the conversion or replacement of redundant traditional non-domestic buildings the new guidance states that:

“For the purposes of this policy “redundant” is defined as buildings which:

- are no longer fit for purpose, or
- are surplus to the current or likely future operational requirements of the business. In all case it must be demonstrated that the buildings are no longer in use, and that they cannot be sold or let on the open market for another employment use. Evidence will be required that the buildings have been marketed for sale or rent for employment use for at least 1 year.”

We were delighted at this outcome. It indicates the Council’s desire to protect its rural environment, including the Braes of the Carse, from future inappropriate development.

We had less success when we drew to the Council’s attention the potential adverse consequences to the small roads running through the Sidlaws (particularly past the villages of Rait and Abernyte) from increased traffic as a result of the Cross Tay Link Road (CTLR). We were concerned that the roads would become a “rat run” for those seeking to get to Dundee from Scone where the CTLR would terminate and that the existing road network would be completely unable to cope with an increased volume of traffic and increased use by heavy vehicles and lorries. Unfortunately the CTLR is a major infrastructure project for PKC and despite our local councillors also sharing our concerns the decision was made to proceed with the CTLR as planned. There is a planning condition attached to the road to stipulate that before and after traffic surveys will be done....but this isn’t much consolation once the road is in place.

Specific planning issues

1 Pond House, Ballindean - 20/00034/IPL

This application was for a new house in the garden ground of Pond House and caused concern among our local members. We supported objections from local residents and argued the application did not comply with the Housing in the Countryside policy as it was neither infill nor did it extend a building group into a defined site. It did not respect the character and building pattern of the existing group. The size of the plot was inappropriately small and its proximity to a Category B listed wall that encloses some of the existing houses meant that the setting of the listed wall would be adversely affected. The planning application was refused and was not appealed.

2 Witches Knowe Wood, Rait - 20/00464/FLL

This application relates to the formation of a cemetery close to the village of Rait and caused concern to many of our members in that village due to potential increased traffic in the village and on our local roads unable to cope with it. The original application was withdrawn and an amended application is currently lodged with PKC and we have just been informed that the revised application has been refused.

3 Land between Kinnaird and Craigdallie - 20/00514/IPL

This application was for a house to the west of the building group of Craigdallie. We objected on the basis that it would be ribbon development contrary to Council policy. It would also be immediately adjacent to Kinnaird boundary which extends to the south down to the crossroads and includes Westmill Farmhouse. Any development adjacent to a settlement boundary is contrary to policy. We also argued it would be contrary to the Landscape Supplementary Guidance. An objective of the Guidance in relation to the Sidlaw area is to "preserve the distinctive character of small villages along the Braes of the Carse". The planning application was refused (for the reasons that we argued), then appealed by the applicant and we have just learnt that the appeal to the Local Review Body has been unsuccessful with the majority of the Councillors agreeing with the planning officer that the application was contrary to planning policy.

4 Tree Preservation Order on Wester Ballindean Orchard

We applied to PKC to have a TPO put on this historic mixed orchard. A planning application was submitted for the westmost part of this historic orchard (the part that is still there) back in the 1990s but it was refused, appealed and the appeal rejected. The east most half of the original orchard had been allowed to be developed (2 houses) earlier in the 90s. The landowner could apply for permission to build again at any time.

The village had already lost one of its orchards when the large plum orchard that used to be at the east end of the village was bulldozed by the land owner in 2018 prior to the submission of a planning application for a house (which application was refused). We argued that the remaining part of the Wester Ballindean orchard, although now overgrown and abandoned, was of both cultural and historical significance to the village and enhanced the village setting.

We provided a copy of Dr Crispin Hayes 2007 report on the Carse orchards which supported our view that the orchard was of significant value both historically and culturally. The Wester Ballindean orchard was shown on an 1860s map confirming its historic nature. In the report the remaining part of the orchard was listed as one of the "orchard gems of the Carse". The conclusion in the report was that the Wester Ballindean orchard was one of only 9 orchards in the Carse "of premier heritage interest".

The Council officer agreed that the orchard was indeed worthy of protection (although securing a TPO on a whole orchard rather than on a specific tree or trees was unusual) and the TPO has been approved by PKC despite objection by the landowner.

2020 has been a busy year for planning issues despite the pandemic. We have been pleased to be able to continue to provide support to our local members in respect of contentious planning issues that are important to both them and BCCG in the conservation of the character and historic environment of the Braes of the Carse area. Thanks must go to Stephen Hole for his continued monitoring of PKC's weekly lists of planning applications on our behalf.

Alison Ramsay

Birds on the Carse 2020

One of the few advantages of the Covid pandemic is that we have all been spending more time at home. This has resulted in more people going out for a walk locally, and has resulted in a national increase in wildlife observations this year, and the Carse has been no exception.

One of the birds that I have been eager to see is the Hawfinch, this is the UK's largest finch species and is a spectacular bird. A population has been known to be breeding in the grounds of Scone Palace for a few years now, and I have been wondering if they would spread this way. This year I had a report of at least one been seen in the grounds of Fingask Castle. But don't go rushing over to see it, because unfortunately it did not stay for long and no, I did not get to see it - so I will need to continue to hunt for my first sighting!

In late summer/autumn you never know what is going to pop into view. Many species of birds, either no longer constrained by bringing up the next generation or recently fledged birds, move around looking for food or exploring for a nest site for next year. So it is likely that the Goosander seen for a few days on the lake, again in the ground of Fingask was moving around looking for good fishing! A visit to Murie cemetery produced an exciting report of a Crossbill, these finches are usually found in conifer woodland. They use their cross-bill to twist apart conifer cones and extract seeds to eat. BCCG members in Abernethy and Ballindean have been lucky this year with sightings of red kite.

The down side of this year has been that a number of the nest-box sites that I normally monitor did not receive a visit this year. Fortunately I was able to monitor a few. One of my initial observations on Tree Sparrow nesting this year was it was not as successful as in previous years. The number of birds that fledged from each nest was down, and an above average number of nests failed totally. Now what the reason for this was is hard to say, it will be interesting to see what the national picture was. If you look at the Tree Sparrow results for our garden we averaged 2.35 birds fledging per nest, this is the lowest number for the last eight years. But these birds are prolific breeders and I expect that given a normal season next year the population will recover quickly.

Barry Cauldwell

BUTTERFLY UPDATE FOR BCCG

One of the consequences of lockdown was that we were still able to spend more time out in our own local areas recording butterflies, moths and other wildlife. Our summer was enriched not only by walks to some wonderful species rich areas in the Sidlaws but also by visits to several farms including the recently created wild flower meadow at Guardswell – now supporting an enormous quantity of insects including the Dark Green Fritillary.

The Northern Brown Argus is a priority species which members of Butterfly Conservation (BC) have been surveying for in our area for several years now. In particular we carry out an annual survey and a training day at Lundie Craigs. Not quite in our area but there are many sites for the species along the Sidlaws. This year seems to have proved a good one for this species with a large number of eggs being laid and adults seen on the wing in good numbers at sites in the Sidlaws. This butterfly

is a specialist, confined to places where the Common Rock-rose occurs. BC volunteers have been re-visiting sites where the butterfly was recorded historically and the good news is that the butterfly is still present in most sites where the food plant occurs. The major threat would be loss of sites owing to loss of species rich grassland, which would also of course affect many other species. Sites can also be damaged or threatened by over-grazing when the Rock-rose is lost, or by under-grazing and enrichment through the advance of taller grasses and other vegetation which occurs with "improved" grassland.

One species that has been expanding its range rapidly is the Speckled Wood. Found north of us at Pitlochry and to the West of Perth as well as to the South in Fife, it has not been recorded from the Braes of the Carse until this summer. Excitingly this butterfly has turned up half way between Perth and Dundee and bang in the middle of our area. It was Barry himself who discovered it! It is not listed as a priority species, but it is very special to have an extra species to add to our fauna. It also appears that it was not just an odd individual but probably a breeding colony and it does seem likely that there must be more colonies out there. This is something to keep our eyes on for next summer when we hope they will spread to more new locations around here. It is a butterfly which occurs in sunny glades close to woodland with abundant flowers or fruit on which it feeds nearby.

Much interest in the Purple Hairstreak has been generated by local recorder Chris Stamp. He put a lot of effort over the summer into surveying for this rarely seen butterfly. It is rarely seen because it inhabits the canopy of oak trees both as an adult and that is also where the eggs are laid and the caterpillar feeds. As a consequence it is exceedingly difficult to spot and few people go looking up into the tops of oak trees with pairs of binoculars, which is what is needed! However Chris's enthusiasm incited several people including ourselves to go looking. And guess what, a large number of new sites were discovered in oak trees, both on the Carse down by the Tay and on both sides of the Sidlaws. This was a great revelation and great to realise that the Braes of the Carse is a hotspot for this species.

The general impression in 2020 was that it was a good one for the more specialist species of butterflies early in the summer. The season came to a fairly sudden halt with some cold nights in September and following this we saw rather fewer of the late-summer wider-countryside species such as Peacock and the immigrant Red Admiral which often hang on into the autumn. At the transect which I regularly walk near Coupar Angus for the Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey there were very few generalist butterflies about in the middle of August compared with other years.

SOME NOTES ON PRIORITY SPECIES IN OUR AREA

Under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan species have been prioritised for conservation reasons. These responsibilities for biodiversity have been set down by the United Nations. A priority species in the list is threatened globally and declining rapidly in the UK. Of the species laid down there are 24, of which four occur in our immediate very local area. These species are listed below with a brief summary of the type of place where they are found:-

Grayling: Sparsely vegetated places, well-drained soils and breeds on grasses that grow there.

Northern Brown Argus: Occurs in species rich grassland with Rock-rose present on which it breeds.

Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary: Species rich damp grassland with violets on which it breeds.

Small Heath: Unimproved grassland with Sheep's Fescue grass and is common in suitable places in our area (it is declining rapidly owing to loss of such habitat).

Butterfly Conservation have produced a Scottish Conservation Strategy which details geographical areas of priority. Despite efforts to include them, the Sidlaws and Carse were not included in this document as priority landscapes. It is therefore important that local groups should put all the more effort into the protection of our local sites which support priority species. Tayside Biodiversity Forum has taken the lead in making sure that such species are covered in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

Thanks to Guardswell and Gasconhall farms for letting us visit them and also to Peter Leslie.

Cathy Cauldwell

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Thanks must go to our Committee members who have continued with BCCG work throughout these strange times.

Thanks go to -

Marilyn Webb for her continued work as BCCG secretary.

Gordon Nicol for his work on the website/IT

Stephen Hole for checking the PKC planning applications.

Alison Ramsay for her work on co-ordinating BCCG members' responses to planning applications and keeping us up to date on strategic planning matters.

Tom Dowie for his work as Treasurer.

Wishing all our members a safe, happy and more 'normal' 2021.

Christine Hall, Chair of BCCG