



Biodiversity Working Group

Mole Valley District Council

Dorking, RH4 1SJ

Wednesday 27th September 2017 10:00-13:00

Minutes

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| 1. | Present: | Mike Waite (Chair/Surrey Wildlife Trust); Helen Cocker (Surrey Countryside Partnership); Stewart Cocker (Epsom & Ewell BC); Simon Elson (Surrey CC); John Edwards (Surrey CC); Ann Sankey (Surrey Botanical Society); Cheryl Brunton (Runnymede BC); Lara Beattie (Woking BC); Francesca Taylor (Environment Agency); Dave Page (Elmbridge BC); Jim Jones (Surrey Wildlife Trust); Georgina Terry (Natural England); Rod Shaw (Mole Valley DC); Ross Baker/Lynn Whitfield (Surrey Bat Group) | |
| | Apologies: | Alistair Kirk (Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre); Sarah Jane Chimbwandira (Surrey Nature Partnership/SWT); Simon Saville (Butterfly Conservation); Peter Winfield (Runnymede BC); Tracey Haskins (Woking BC); David Olliver (Waverley BC) | |
| 2a. | The minutes of the meeting 3rd May 2017 were agreed , subject to minor corrections at pp. 3 & 4. See here (on SyNP website). | | Action |
| 2b. | Matters Arising: | <p>Surrey Local Sites Partnership webpage on the SNP website has been scoped, but not yet inserted, by AK, JE & MW. The model would be TVERC's Local Wildlife Sites webpage (see here). This features a 'Living List' (ie. annually updated) of SNCI and Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS), by LPA. Webpage would also carry SLSP proceedings and appropriate explanatory/interpretive content.</p> <p>Langley Vale WWI Centenary Woodland Open Spaces Advisory Group; this EIA-conditioned OSA Group met most recently 06/09, chaired by Rob Fairbanks of Surrey Hills AONB. Both HC and MW from BioWG were present. BioWG queried whether any further flexibility exists on ratio of open: wooded habitat in site masterplan. MW was doubtful; his understanding is that any remaining deliberation concerns the eventual habitat type & management of the (now fixed) area of open habitats. MW to confirm this. Woodland Trust has sought expert advice of Plantlife specialists on ideal management prescriptions to conserve the rare & unique botanical interest. These are of a high standard and to be embedded in the overall site Management Plan (also EIA-conditioned) due out for consultation in draft in November. OSAG to meet next in 2018 and discuss response to consultation. AS has written a paper on history of botanical recording at LV reiterating its importance; was sent to WT for wider distribution to all staff/volunteers involved. Q. Did this get discussed in OSAG mtg? A.=no. MW/HC to check paper is adequately reflected in draft Management Plan (dMP). Public Access planning to be considered separately, subject to a further EIA; clearly this also relates fundamentally to how habitats are managed and an integrated overview is important. Again responses to the dMP should scrutinise for this. WT has advertised for a Project Officer recently; should we invite to provide update to BioWG?</p> <p>MW has met with Woodland Trust's Jenny Scholfield who has welcomed partnership of Biodiversity Working Group as a corresponding member. Covered LV; WT's profile across Surrey, inc. in the Low Weald northwest of Gatwick, at Effingham etc; Wealden PAWS Restoration project (to date largely concentrated in Kent & E. Sussex). Has provided contacts to ensure joined-up working, and keenly anticipates future partnership opportunities across eNGO sector reflecting current national joint aspiration for landscape-scale agenda of TWT, NT, RSPB & WT.</p> | MW |



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| | <p>JE - where is the formal planning process currently around car-parking and visitor facilities? Will be partly in MVDC, part in E&EBC (R&BBC is also involved). RS understanding that a planning application is intended soon, but heard nothing further on this. SC concurred for E&E. RB - Ecological surveys (probably for access EIA?) have recently been tendered. MW will attempt to gain a clearer picture of process.</p> <p>River Thames Scheme; MW & GT both at a recent meeting with the EA (& consultants Black & Veatch) in August to discuss latest scheme masterplan to avoid impacts at Thorpe Hay Meadow SSSI, as well as the Laleham Lakes SNCI complex. SE on Environment Advisory Group, where reporting line of influence is far from clear. Latest on achieving Net Gain within the scheme could involve a 'wetlands centre'-type concept at Abbey Lakes east of Thorpe Park, as well as at Desborough Island. RTS total cost is again coming under scrutiny however, and the realisation of a considerable funding shortfall. Website content is here.</p> <p>Surrey's State of Nature report; document published on time end-May. SWT/SNP publicity campaign throughout June involved mail-out to Surrey MPs, LA Leaders/CEOs/ Planning Heads, plus other key contacts recommended by BioWG. SJC interviewed on BBC Radio Surrey ref. report's findings & messages (fortunately co-incident with appointment of Michael Gove to SoS for Environment role). SWT currently pitching its 'Recovering Surrey's Nature' appeal and future strategic direction on back of report. [Hard copies distributed to group members at meeting]. AS - perhaps group could digest further and discuss next steps at a future meeting?</p> <p>SWT Planning Services training roadshow will visit Guildford BC in October; Tandridge DC in November.</p> <p>Some discussion on tree health; Box blight fungus (<i>Cylindrocladium buxicola</i>) symptoms not to be confused with those of alien Box tree moth (<i>Cydalima perspectalis</i>), for which vigilance is necessary in view of our locally unique exposure at Box Hill.</p> <p>Surrey Infrastructure Study; link sent out to BioWG by JE following last meeting.</p> | <p>MW</p> |
| <p>3.</p> | <p>Sites of Nature Conservation Importance - Review Programme & Single-Data List 160-00 report 2017</p> <p>No further comments received on draft Surrey Local Sites Partnership 'Terms of Reference' document. LSP concerned with immediate fallout from most recent meeting in May, and the review of the Wisley Airfield SNCI. JE to consult AK over further revision, prior to final sign-off and eventual presentation by JE to Surrey Planning Working Group. We will be seeking an active adoption of the document from this latter group, so will need to maintain a follow-up strategy toward achieving that end. The aim will be to have ToR document finally signed-off by end-2017. Meanwhile we will set up the SLSP website page.</p> <p>Single-Data List 160-00 report 2017. Reports a slight increase this year of 1% (at 49%) SNCI in 'positive management' (2016= 48%). Initial analysis suggests this increase was due in part to inclusion of sites in receipt of non-woodland options for Countryside Stewardship (dataset not available in 2016), plus continued improvement in our knowledge of individual sites (collated as part of the annual LA/Countryside Management Project consultation or via the ongoing LWS resurvey program). The total number of Local Sites also rose which had a slight statistical effect. The Indicator continues to play a valuable role and contributes to our evidence base on the condition of Local Sites across the County.</p> | <p>JE/AK</p> |
| <p>4.</p> | <p>Natural England - current regional strategic priorities</p> <p>(<i>Conservation 21: Natural England's conservation strategy for the 21st century</i> is here). GT's presentation is attached with this document [Paper A].</p> <p>GT is in NE's Thames Team (inc. Berks, Bucks, Oxon, GL & Surrey). Current business falls into 'Focus Areas', and is the team's regional interpretation of <i>Conservation 21</i>. Has x3 themes;</p> | |



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| | <p>'Putting people at the heart' (access/interpretation agenda - very important as region holds 25% of England's population); 'Growing Natural Capital'; 'Creating resilient landscapes & seas' (landscape-scale agenda & projects, with regional focus on connectivity between Wood pasture & parkland sites as well as Lowland heathland sites. 'Our Places' (for the Thames Region) - see ppt. slide 3. 'Planes, Trains & Automobiles' = major infrastructure projects, many of which effect the region (eg. HS2, Heathrow expansion, M25/J10 improvement scheme etc.) Slide 4 = What, Where & Why? inc. potential partnerships & advocacy work. Slide 5 = Calcareous landscapes example. Slide 6 = Ancient trees & woods example.</p> <p>RB; is there a danger that regionalised approach could miss cross-boundary issues (eg. rare woodland bats in Surrey/Sussex)? GT NE is aware - boundary would sensibly dissolve in this instance. SE; is there still room for review of SSSI boundaries/new sites? GT this a very resource-heavy undertaking, but never-say-never, and primarily driven by degree of threat. New SSSI notifications are made, an eg. is Rampisham Down in Dorset (2013). MW enquired after the proposed denotification of Reigate Heath SSSI unit 01. GT believes still on agenda and in process. SE; this is may not be so straightforward - there is the potentially damaging role of adjacent Buckland sand-pit to consider and a possibility of restorative enforcement action (EA is involved here). SE also cited the acknowledged long-overdue review of SE London Waterbodies SPA units, where wintering wildfowl interest has re-adjusted naturally to include some non-SSSI sites. RB; scope for review of Chiddingfold SSSI boundaries? GT; more likely to work in a landowner advice on landscape scale before attempting this.</p> <p>Further discussion included around ensuring there is alignment of the landscape-scale response across respective organisations; what 'Creating resilient landscapes' means for Surrey (by contrast with other counties); mixed relevance therefore of learning from neighbouring counties' experience; existence of an ongoing county ancient/veteran tree inventory - work for Ancient Tree Forum by Dick Alder? - need to find out more; Woodland Trust dataset Ancient Tree Inventory; Treezilla website; Traffic infrastructure non-operational land management opportunities.</p> | MW |
| <p>5.</p> | <p>Surrey Nature Partnership - current & future emphases.</p> <p>SJC not available to update here. MW distributed the Briefing Note on delivering a Natural Capital approach in Surrey paper. MW briefly re-capped on origins of this and emphasised the imperative now to develop a Natural Capital Investment Plan, featuring a portfolio of investable natural capital projects. SJC has tasked MW to begin this work and is likely to seek members' assistance on 'ground-truthing' this in the coming months. SJC has offered to update more fully at a future meeting.</p> | SJC |
| <p>6.</p> | <p>Partner Updates</p> <p>Helen Cocker (Surrey Countryside Partnerships)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCC Countryside team management level reorganisation. Rod Edbrook replaced by David Greenwood. JE moved to planning team. • Update on various projects - Lower Mole CP have controversially fenced dogs out of a pond on Nonsuch Park. Condition assessment on Downlands' HLS calcareous grassland sites taken place over the summer. Heathland Project - recent liaison visit to Sheets Heath, where rate of gorse re-growth is a concern. Influence of atmospheric eutrophication, climate change perhaps? Any research available on this? Possibly local downturn in rabbit grazing pressure is to blame. <p>Stewart Cocker (Epsom & Ewell BC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sarah Clift delivered a successful Horton Country Park Bioblitz partnered with ?Trust. • Grazing of Epsom common has gone well after initial problems re. interaction with walkers etc. • OPM has shown exponential increase - Forestry Commission funded removal of nests continues for now. Ash dieback also increasingly widespread. | |



- Assistance provided to E&E planning team with a planning application validation biodiversity criteria list. Also on planning is a current consultation on proposals for Green Belt boundary adjustment and releases (for development).

Simon Elson (SCC)

- Recent involvement in Heathrow Airport expansion planning.
- Restored Molesey Reservoirs ongoing saga - is trying desperately to move this forward with all players involved (SyWT, Thames Water etc.).
- Fears for further public funding cuts inevitably hitting our sector hardest - citing Reigate & Banstead BC loss of personnel/time.

John Edwards (SCC)

- Further on SCC reorganisation. JE & Charmaine Smith to join Jessica Salder in Planning Team, but Charmaine has actually opted for voluntary redundancy. Post to be advertised soon.

Georgina Terry (Natural England)

- Ash dieback – now rampant. Some larger ash could be showing signs of resistance however. Clearly important to note any sign of this. Bramble a problem on grassland sites this year - eutrophication?

Ann Sankey (Surrey Botanical Society)

- Monad mapping work continues for publication of the Surrey Rare Plants Register, and BSBI Atlas 2020.
- Sandhurst Military Academy recently visited.

Francesca Taylor (Environment Agency)

- Godalming Flood Alleviation Scheme - detailed planning application submitted this month. Had pre-app consultation with SyWT, Surrey Badger Group. Tree bat roost also impacted. No requirement for EIA (screened out).
- Wey Weirs Refurbishment project – at Ham, Newark, Walton (all bypass) weirs in 2017. To progress to Broadmead, Bowers, Stoke, Millmead locks in 2018 (last has an inherent hydropower complication).
- White-clawed crayfish - possibility of relict population still on Tillingbourne system at Wotton Estate.
- Currently NNIS Floating pennywort spiking on Wey system especially. Complications with spraying licences.

Lara Beattie (Woking BC)

- Natural Woking talk events - Bats in May (thank you SBatG) and Swifts in July.
- Update on Woking Great crested newt Habs Regs EPS 'favourable conservation status' landscape enabling pilot project. A similar approach to bats is under discussion with NE - also to be piloted in Woking.
- Woking LA21 AGM upcoming 16 November.

Ross Baker (Surrey Bat Group)

- Alcathe whiskered bat surveys ongoing. No further evidence to contradict theory that Surrey/Sussex is the national stronghold. Species is present on Holmwood Common - notably not selected as an SNCI. Deliberation over qualifying criteria for SSSI/SNCI designation for this species.
- Significant Barbastelle activity detected 2017 at Wanborough Woods - ongoing SNCI re-surveys has facilitated this. Adjacent land recently sold-off for its development potential possibly.
- Molesey Reservoirs. SBG involved in discharge of planning condition.

Cheryl Brunton (Runnymede BC)

- Chertsey Meads SANG Management Plan currently being prepared; for publication October



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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Plan 2035. Additional Sites and Options consultation happened over the summer. Next stage is Pre-submission Plan Regulation 19 consultation scheduled for January 2018. <p>Dave Page (Elmbridge BC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Countryside team concerned about site management funding. HLS ends 2018, still unclear regarding continuity strategy. Esher Commons SANG - liaison with NE to fine-tune proposed works within the SSSI. Local Plan Green Belt release consultation. Version 2 of this will be available imminently. Working with EA at Fairmile Ditch. Flood alleviation scheme opportunities. EA/SCC/EBC liaison meetings - sound forum, upcoming in October. Dog problems on Esher Commons - from commercial dog-walking especially. OPM - targeted approach is required, removal strategy poses significant threat to native invertebrates. Oxshott Heath Conservators - will disband Friends group, mgt. goes back to EBC. West End Common - works forthcoming; woodland mgmt. work, also pond fencing proposals but <i>Crassula</i> mgmt. complications here. Evidence of adders breeding successfully on Fairmile Common. <p>Rod Shaw (MVDC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> World Rivers Day celebrated successfully at Leatherhead on R. Mole. Recently approved planning application for Wildlife Aid's re-location site. MVDC Local Plan 'Future Mole Valley' Issues & Options consultation just passed. <p>Jim Jones (SWT)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rivers Week - events throughout county inc. at Molesey Reservoirs and at Dapdune Wharf. River restoration CaBA-driven projects: EA Environment Improvement Fund completed this year at Rye Brook, Ashtead and Pipp Brook on Mole. Frensham Ponds phosphate awareness project - EA funded again, door-drop leafletting plus a workshop to raise local awareness of potential pollution from off-mains drained properties upstream especially of the Great Pond (closed for bathing x2 years running due to blue-green algal outbreaks). Cranleigh Waters project planning for next year, involving river restoration with Cranleigh Civic Society and Thames Water. SWT intends to launch 'Hedgerow Heroes' later this year, see here. <p>Mike Waite (for Butterfly Conservation)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simon Saville will replace Gail Jeffcoate on BioWG. BC attended first of Langley Vale OSAG meetings, but will not remain a member as not immediate priority for lepidoptera. Small blue "Stepping stones" project has appointed a Project officer - ex-SWT Fiona Haynes now in post. Working in partnership with SWT and NT, aims to join up chalk grassland habitat areas on North Downs to the east of Guildford, see here. <u>For SWT</u>. Has been attending Former Wisley Airfield planning refusal appeal at Guildford BC offices. J10/M25 Improvement Scheme - ongoing discussions with Highways England. HE intends a Net Gain from this project. Preferred option for the roundabout enlargement we are told will be announced before Christmas. Tandridge DC currently consulting on location & idea for a Garden Village development in the district. x4 conceptual options – one not far from Blindley Heath SSSI. | |
| | <p>Dates of 2018 meetings;</p> <p>Wednesday 10th January, Wednesday 9th May, Wednesday 19th September (all 10.00-13.00). Offer from LB of venue for January meeting at Woking BC. Thank you to RS for today's venue.</p> | |