



Biodiversity Working Group at Elmbridge Borough Council Wednesday 9th May 2018 10:00-13:00

Minutes

1.	Present:	Mike Waite (Chair/Surrey Wildlife Trust); Dave Page (Elmbridge BC); Georgina Terry (Natural England); Ross Baker/Lynn Whitfield (Surrey Bat Group); Ann Sankey (Surrey Botanical Society); Stewart Cocker (Epsom & Ewell BC); Helen Cocker (Surrey Countryside Partnership); John Edwards (Surrey CC); Simon Saville (Butterfly Conservation); Jane Peberdy (Runnymede BC); Hendryk Jurk (Guildford Borough Council)	
	Apologies:	Alistair Kirk (Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre); Cheryl Brunton (Runnymede BC); Peter Winfield (Runnymede BC); Simon Elson (Surrey CC); Jim Jones (Surrey Wildlife Trust); James Power (NT); Lara Beattie/Tracey Haskins (Woking BC); Francesca Taylor (Environment Agency); Rod Shaw (Mole Valley DC); Sarah Jane Chimbwandira (Surrey Nature Partnership/SWT)	
2.	The minutes of the meeting 10th January 2018 were agreed, see here (on SyNP website).		Action
3.	Matters Arising:	<p>Surrey Local Sites Partnership webpage on the SNP website - no action.</p> <p>Langley Vale Centenary Wood. The planning application for car-park and visitor infrastructure plus supporting EIA was discussed. R&BBC is now the lead LPA, although each LA will issue its own decision. There remain several issues to be addressed by WT, which are delaying determination. Hopeful for a decision by mid-May. The OSWG has met recently - the draft Open Spaces Management Plan was discussed there; some further adjustments are being proposed to accommodate botanical interest confirmed in 2017.</p> <p>JE - proposed SCC Landscape Conservation post partnered with Historic England; decision pending (no word from HE as yet).</p> <p>J10/M25 Improvement Scheme - Highways England formal consultation on their preferred options for scheme now closed. SWT/SCC in continuing discussions with Atkins (HE consultants), and are pushing for maximum Net Gain. Within mitigation/compensation strategy there are up to x2 'multifunctional' (but unilluminated) green bridges proposed, over the A3 close to Old Lane and also over the M25. RB - lighting is indeed an issue, as roosting <i>Myotis</i> bats are present, esp. near Semaphore Tower. MW confirmed he has raised the opportunity for Hatchford Wood SNCI with its historic icehouse to be included in mitigation/compensation strategy.</p> <p>NE Standing Advice on Ancient woodland and veteran trees. A specialist working group has been looking into the recent guidance change implications, and there will be a yet another revision resulting from this. At a recent CIEEM SE Regional Committee meeting Jay Doyle proposed a workshop about this, potentially at Dunsfold (given relevance of the airfield development and ancient woodland), to involve NE, developer, consultants and academia. MW to ask JD for progress update.</p> <p>Potential 2018 business/discussion topics - to discuss an imminent/currently open Local Plan consultation in a workshop forum. Intention is to do this when a suitable opportunity arises (possibly outcome to MVDC's initial 'call for sites'). This can be linked to developing series of strategic Green Infrastructure opportunities for inclusion in the NCIP 'project pipeline.</p> <p>CIEEM has recently issued a position paper on the District Licensing pilot for great crested</p>	MW



	<p>newts (GCN), conducted in Woking BC. Whilst it welcomes initiatives to streamline the protected species licensing system it is also critical of theoretical model to achieve its objective, see here. A scoping meeting to discuss the application of a district licensing approach to the legal protection of bats took place in Woking in February, as borough could again host the pilot.</p>	
<p>4.</p>	<p>Surrey Local Sites Partnership update</p> <p>Sites of Nature Conservation Importance Review Programme: Final draft of Surrey Local Sites Partnership ‘Terms of Reference’ document still not finished. Both MW and JE have attempted to chase. Understood that there is minimal work left to do, which JE had earlier offered to complete. SBIC has been short-staffed for a while, and under a heavy workload during this time. The document has been in draft for over 12 months however and is critical to the next stage of the review programme; endorsement by the Planning Working Group and use as an essential informative by Surrey’s planning sector. SBIC will be joined by a new staff member shortly, which should greatly enable completion. Agreed that a meeting is required to plan a new timeline to completion, to involve JE, AK & MW asap. MW to action.</p> <p>Local Wildlife Sites in the proposed revision of the National Planning Policy Framework: MW explained the issue that has arisen here, prompting a campaign petition from The Wildlife Trusts. The only reference in the existing NPPF to “..locally designated sites”, is in the context of the hierarchy of sites important for biodiversity and integral to local ecological networks (Chapter 11, paras.113 & 117), but this proposed to be dropped. Moreover in the opening chapter concerned with guiding the presumption for favouring ‘sustainable’ development, the existing footnote providing an exemplary-style list of the types of sites restricted from this presumption would now become a definitive list, which does not include eg. LWS (or Priority habitats for that matter). The inverse assumption is that the presence of these would henceforth pose no constraint to an otherwise ‘sustainable development’. The footnote to guidance as contained in Circular 06/2005 remains however, which is clear and prescriptive on the role and protection of LWS in planning. Consultation on the NPPF revision closes 10/05. SWT will be responding to support the TWT campaign on this matter.</p> <p>Dawn Fielding (SWT) is leading a SNCI project reflecting the focussed (ie. in selected BOAs) approach of the Trust’s new Strategic Plan. She will be engaging private SNCI owner/managers to articulate their biodiversity importance, and offer management advice and support. This will stop short of applying for eg. Countryside Stewardship, however. She will be starting in the North Downs.</p> <p>Discussion followed around merits of the term ‘SNCI’ vs. ‘LWS’; is it time for a change? HK cited case of a Guildford planning colleague who believed the borough had no LWS as such, failing to grasp the connection with SNCI. MW of the opinion that to changeover now would most likely only add to confusion and not be helpful. We could return to this debate (in context of SLSP) <i>after</i> the ToR review work is completed. GBC have after all recently hosted the SWT Biodiversity & planning roadshow, so really ought to know better.</p> <p>Further discussion around commitment to borough-wide SNCI/LWS re-survey, and relevance of possible dereliction of NERC Act Biodiversity Duty in this regard. Suggestion for SNP to formally write to CEOs/Chief PlanningOs offering advice/reminder of duty. MW/JE to discuss with SJC.</p>	<p>MW</p> <p>MW</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Update following publication of Surrey Nature Partnership Natural Capital Investment Plan (NCIP).</p> <p>MW distributed hard-copies of NCIP at meeting. In absence of SJC no further update as such. Members welcomed document; some still found concept a little hard-going. MW recommended two useful articles across previous and current volumes of <i>British Wildlife</i> magazine on the topic. Both are informative and enlightening. All agreed development of ‘project pipeline’ would bring</p>	



	added clarity over role and meaning of NC investment mechanisms.	
6.	<p>Partner Updates</p> <p>John Edwards (SCC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Besides the M25 J10 Improvement Scheme, Heathrow new runway and the River Thames (flood alleviation) Scheme, a further planned major infrastructure project to impact the county's biodiversity is the Esso Southampton-Heathrow replacement pipeline. Esso has recently consulted on three possible route options, including using their preferred existing route (crossing Chobham Common), plus two variations to the south. Besides the statutory protected site(s), all impact SNCI to various degrees whilst attempting to largely avoid Ancient woodland. SWT and SCC have recently met with Jacobs (Esso's consultant) to discuss the project and its options. This will similarly require a Development Consent Order for planning consent. <p>Jane Peberdy (for Cheryl Brunton, Runnymede BC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Runnymede's Local Plan will be under further consultation imminently. This will be a final public opportunity to respond to a revision of the Draft Submission Local Plan, following its Regulation 19 consultation in January. <p>Helen Cocker (Surrey Countryside Partnerships)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have recently been consulted on a former fly ash landfill site near Caterham. Can report Surrey rarity Wild liquorice <i>Astragalus glycyphyllos</i> appears to be increasing on the privately-owned section of the Quarry Hangers SSSI managed by Downlands Partnership. Restructure following funding cut now completed with the loss of one post to SCP. <p>Georgina Terry (Natural England)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recently advising on several EA fish pass projects on River Wey within Wey Valley Meadows SSSI (see FT below). Countryside Stewardship application process now closed for this year; now assessing these for Surrey and as the fund is competitive across England not all will succeed, as known to be a huge number of upland applications in pipeline. Has been a spike in potential SSSI infringements, where private landowners have damaged habitats in 'land-grab' movements on peripheries of several sites. Request to all to be vigilant to this. Several new staff additions to team recently, all on steep training curves. Proposes inviting her 'Sustainable Development Officer' colleague to join group and perhaps alternate meetings with GT, as can then input to growing planning & development business of the BioWVG. All approved. <p>Stewart Cocker (Epsom & Ewell BC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> E&E Countryside Team to consolidate with 'Operational Services', which is not ideal but should not change much. OPM infestation is worsening in Epsom and Ashtead area. NE has resisted full FC spraying protocol in protected sites where SSSI interest feature includes invertebrates or breeding birds. Generating a lot of work and is a losing battle, so NE hope Defra will relax control mission. Becoming a growing threat to status of native oak; hopefully natural predation will begin to contain spread. RPA payments to E&E have been considerably delayed; local MP now made aware. GCN numbers in Stones Road Pond SSSI (primary notified feature) healthy this year. Hogsmill Catchment Partnership, led by SE Rivers Trust becoming more active in project work, including various flood attenuation schemes. <p>Dave Page (Elmbridge BC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Floating pennywort; following last year's EA efforts, there appears to be a hiatus in will/financial commitment towards control at present. EA in ongoing collaboration with 	



EBC.

- Broadwater Lake update; this long lake is now publicly accessible which has brought interest from groups wanting to improve/consERVE/restore the lake and surrounds. The lake is very silted, stocked with carp and overgrown in places but has good biodiversity because of its undisturbed nature. Problem is there are about 20 landowners and a project approach is required to agree how to manage the new public access (dog walkers). **DP** has volunteered to bring all this together and Elmbridge Natural History Society members will survey the site (including bats) and collate information to inform decisions using the precautionary principle.
- Declining Lesser spotted woodpecker heard at Littleheath Common, Oxshott this April.

Ann Sankey (Surrey Botanical Society)

- Noted concern over Northey Fields SNCI (Epsom) – under threat?
- Laleham golf course – recently-discovered botanical interest, worthy of SNCI selection. **MW** - this site is within orbit of River Thames Scheme, and presently indicated as probable main area for biodiversity net gain habitat creation project.
- Hurst Park SNCI, Molesey – continuing threats to botanical interest from Water Activity Centre proposal.
- Reigate Heath SSSI – AS & MW in recent meeting with NE to discuss their intention to denotify units 1 & 3. Case against this involves the removal of the most likely cause of long-term damage to the site (de-watering of nearby sand-pits), with evidence for some recovery of on-site water-levels now quite obvious. Positive management of esp. unit 3 has also been neglected. NE claims deterioration is irreversible. There will be further opportunity for discussion, as de-notification will require formal consultation, when objections could be made.

Hendryk Jurk (Guildford BC)

- Also involved recently in advising on EA's planned fish passes on River Wey, on Guildford land at Millmead & Burpham Court Farm (see **FT** below).
- Proposed new open space/SANG at Tyting Farm on the North Downs east of Guildford, offering opportunity for significant habitat creation/restoration.
- GBC increasing their cut-&-collect management regime across estate (more beneficial for grassland biodiversity).

Lynn Whitfield (Surrey Bat Group)

- SBG working with Woking BC and Natural England on a Bat Conservation Plan, involving survey and public engagement. The goal here will be to produce an effective landscape scale conservation plan for bats. This will require sufficient understanding of where the important habitats for bats are and to what degree they are/not connected. This is linked into the intended NE pilot district licensing scheme applied to bats (see Matters Arising above).
- SBG has responded to Guildford BC draft Residential Extensions & Alterations SPG, mainly to flag lack of reference to bat roosts in buildings issue.
- SBG still waiting for appropriate licences to continue Woodland Bat surveys into 2018. Esp. want to return to Wanborough woods/meadows where Barbastelle detected last year. Focus here too is on cryptic *Myotis* sp., esp. Alcaho and Brandt's bats - latter in particular apparently very rare in Surrey.

Simon Saville (BC Surrey Branch)

- Small blue Stepping Stones Project is going very well - newsletter distributed prior to meeting.
- Alien Box moth *Cydalima perspectalis* is expanding its distribution and a potential threat to native Box at Box Hill and Norbury Park.
- BC has now appointed a national Policy & Land-use Officer (Phil Stirling), with a brief to proactively realise development net gain opportunities to benefit priority butterflies ('Building Sites for Butterflies project' - BS4B). Example is Weymouth relief road project where habitat creation for Small blue has been highly successful – site now supports 27 spp.



(Absentee submitted updates)

Lara Beattie (Woking BC)

- WoBC has submitted planning application for a Swift tower outside the Civic Offices. Design will celebrate Woking's twin towns and also incorporate bat boxes. Information about the local Swift project is available [here](#). Wider project will be delivered by WoBC energy and environmental services company Thameswey Sustainable Communities Ltd.
- Continuing to develop proposals for green walls in Town Centre locations, first of which likely to be close to the railway station. Will incorporate plants beneficial to air quality as well as offering visual enhancement to public realm.
- Beginning work with RHS Wisley to link up relevant workstreams within our Natural Woking strategy. The next Woking LA21 AGM is 7pm on 15/11/18 at WWF HQ to include a talk by an RHS Wisley biodiversity expert - details tbc.
- Peregrines breeding at Export House have four chicks this year – see live webcam footage [here](#).
- GCN surveys are being undertaken at Westfield Common at the moment by ADAS.

Francesca Taylor (Environment Agency)

- **Wey FWD (Fish Pass & Wetland Delivery) project;** Wey FWD is a multi-benefit programme of works aiming to improve fish passage and floodplain connectivity across the Wey catchment. A 'brush' fish pass has just been constructed at the top end of the Hell Ditch in Godalming. Brushes still need fixing but the construction works are now complete. Once operational, will bypass two structures on the main river Wey and open up 5.6km of river. Over next two years plans to deliver x5 more fish passes, through the Wey Weirs refurbishment project. Weir refurbishments are essential for maintaining the navigation and protecting properties from flooding but at the same time pose an obstacle to fish passage. Fish passes to be delivered at Hamm, Walsham and Newark weirs this year. Walsham fish pass will consist of a natural bypass channel around the weir and therefore subject to planning permission. Fish passes at Broadmead and Millmead (see GT/HJ above) to be delivered next year subject to planning permission. Working with Guildford BC on design of pass at Millmead as landowner. GBC want EA to host public consultation event this summer ahead of planning. EA intend to use event to publicise wider Wey FWD project. Wey FWD project has funded natural fish bypass channel design at Burpham Court Farm, also wetland habitat enhancement designs commissioned originally by SWT. GBC now intend to apply for Defra Water Environment Grant (WEG) funding to deliver these works.
- FT also working with flood risk colleagues to secure fish passage at remaining four weirs on Wey between the Thames and Godalming (Byfleet, Broadoak, St Catherine's, Unstead) through the Guildford FAS and Byfleet & Weybridge FAS. These schemes are currently at draft Outline Business Case stage with stakeholder workshops to be held later this year. Preferred options not yet chosen but will involve a combination of permanent and temporary flood defences with some associated wetland creation.
- A huge amount of investment into the Wey FWD project over the next few years, largely as a result of flood risk management works. EA hoping to use momentum to build interest in the project and promote the many benefits it will provide; intention to attract future funding and delivery opportunities through a Natural Capital approach. Phase 1 of project focuses on the main reach of the Wey but this as a long term project aiming to restore connectivity throughout the Wey catchment. SWT (catchment partnership hosts) is already progressing habitat improvement and fish passage project on Rivers Tillingbourne and Cranleigh Waters, with Woking BC progressing works on the Hoe Stream.
- **Godalming Flood Alleviation Scheme (FAS);** the planning application has been submitted for this scheme - decision due date is later this month but it may have been delayed. They're hoping to be on-site and start construction in June/July. Habitat enhancements to the Hell Ditch and Lammas Lands will take place later this year/into next year.



	<p>Rod Shaw (MVDC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MV looking at strategic housing development sites arising from a ‘call for sites’. Intention to consult on these this summer but small but significant shift in political profile of Council has blurred timeline for the Local Plan until at least the full council meeting at the end of May. • Park Pit, Buckland outdoor activity/watersports centre: this is a SCC application but MVDC view as a consultee to our Development Control Committee in early April. Members agreed to object on several reasons and requested a Landscape & Ecological Management Plan if the application is approved. MV issues include mix of uses proposed; the structures on the site; lack of clear ecological benefits plus further details poorly set out. Application to be considered by SCC later this month. <p>Jay Doyle (Forestry Commission): recent activity on the Public Forest Estate in Surrey as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bourne Wood: ARC Trust volunteers visited this key site within BOA WG02 (Farnham Heaths) on 17/04 to clear forestry arisings from a clearfelled area being restored to Lowland heathland. • Bury Hill & Redlands (enveloping the Pipp Brook): summer Rhododendron spraying programme is out to tender. JD (FE Ecologist) & Chris Clare (FE Beat Forester) have targeted a large Rhododendron clearance zone to SW of the Pipp Brook corridor (the 3rd since winter 2011/12). This will open up site topography and facilitate understanding of its modified drainage infrastructure, to be restored as part of the EA-led NFM project. Aspiration to develop into one of Surrey’s finest wet woodlands and also contribute to sustainable flood management; • Chiddingfold Forest; entering Yr.3 of an elevated conservation spend across the 840 ha complex with approx. £15k of vegetation management being undertaken for biodiversity conservation during the past two and this pending winter. Efforts are focussed on corridor enhancement for Wood white butterfly but ghyll corridor restoration including invasive NNIS plant management are also important priorities; • Effingham Forest; substantial Rhododendron clearance is also out to tender for this coming winter in our blocks around East Horsley (Dick Focks Common etc.). 	
	<p>AoB: Plantlife’s ‘The Good Verge Guide’ guidance document and campaign for saving roadside wildflower interest has recently been launched, see here.</p>	
	<p>Dates of remaining 2018 meeting;</p> <p>Wednesday 26th September, 10.00-13.00 at Ewell Court House (hosted by Epsom & Ewell BC). Big thank you to DP for today’s venue.</p> <p>Abbreviata: E&EBC - Epsom & Ewell; EBC - Elmbridge; GBC - Guildford; MVDC - Mole Valley; R&BBC - Reigate & Banstead; RBC - Runnymede; SBC - Spelthorne; SHBC - Surrey Heath; TDC - Tandridge; WaBC - Waverley; WoBC -Woking; SCC - Surrey County; NFM – Natural Flood Management; NNIS - Non-native Invasive Species.</p>	