



# Biodiversity Working Group

## Video Conference using Microsoft Teams

### Monday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2020

#### Minutes

1.	<p><b>Present:</b> John Edwards (SCC/Deputy Chair); Lisa Creaye-Griffin (SNP Director); Helen Cocker (Surrey Countryside Partnerships); Stewart Cocker (EEBC); Simon Elson (SCC); Ross Baker/Lynn Whitfield (Surrey Bat Group); Peter Winfield (RBC); Georgina Terry (Natural England); Ann Sankey, Susan Medcalf (Surrey Botanical Society); Isabel Cordwell; (RBC); Mike Coates (RSPB); Steve Price (SpBC); Simon Saville (Butterfly Conservation)</p>	
	<p><b>Apologies:</b> Bill Budd (British Dragonfly Society); Jo Heisse (Environment Agency); Lara Beattie (WoBC); Jo Heisse &amp; Francesca Taylor (Environment Agency); Alistair Kirk (Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre); Dave Page (EBC) Mike Waite (Surrey Wildlife Trust); Rod Shaw (Mole Valley DC); Rachel Coburn (Surrey CC); Hendryk Jurk (GBC; Leigh Thornton (Surrey Wildlife Trust); Jack Thompson (RSPB); Tracey Haskins (WoBC); Henri Brocklebank (SxWT)</p> <p><b>Technical Difficulties;</b> David Watts (R&amp;BBC); David Olliver (WaBC)</p>	
2.	<p><b>The minutes of the meeting of 15<sup>th</sup> January 2020</b> were agreed, subject to some corrections MW highlighted in yellow. Please send to <b>JE</b>. Susan Medcalf reminded us that this is her correct botanical name.</p>	<b>Action</b>
3.	<p><b>Matters Arising:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Review of SNCI selection criteria.</b> SLSP meeting still not fixed; <b>AK/JE</b>. Action c/f to 2020 (see item 6 below). New selection criteria to address important 'assemblages' of single/multiple taxonomic groups intended (reflecting 'bio-diversity'!).</li> <li>• <b>Copthorne Meadows SNCI;</b> <b>GT</b> advised that case is beyond responsibility of Andy Smith; instead recommends contacting Marc Turner (Senior Planning Adviser, Thames &amp; Solent Team). If this Lowland meadow HPI/SNCI is significantly threatened, could indeed necessitate NE's intervention under strict site protective remit. Action <b>JE/AK</b>- to submit SNCI map, selection criteria/citation to Marc T. asap.</li> <li>• <b>Light pollution on Wey/Wey Navigation Canal:</b> <b>RB</b> has chased both EA and site owner on the affected Eashing stretch, but no further action from them. Update from <b>Fran Taylor</b>: I did look into this but unfortunately the EA don't have any powers to do anything about it. I also couldn't find any conditions relating to lighting attached to the planning permission for the site they were concerned about in Eashing. I did suggest they checked with Guildford's planning team to see if the lighting columns actually have planning permission. It might be worth bringing up on today's call if Ross/Lynn and/or someone from GBC joins. I'd be happy to get in contact with GBC if Ross/Lynn didn't get any answers.</li> <li>• <b>Surrey 'Irreplaceable Habitats' guidance:</b> <b>MW</b> has advised that the previous deadline for comments, ie. 13/2 had passed but it was clear that the group needs more time to comment. Action. <b>JE</b> suggested new deadline of 31<sup>st</sup> July, comments to <b>MW</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Working Group Priorities 2020</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Golf Courses advocacy</b> - 'Peak golf' has passed. So time for another push? Golf appears to be in a bit of a crisis presently, with several courses intending closure. Possibly the right time for a strategic approach to bend inevitable changes-of-use towards biodiversity conservation outcomes. <b>MC</b> stated RSPB had employed person to lead on this. Contact xxxx</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>JE</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>JE</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>RB</b></p>
4.	<p><b>Partner Updates.</b></p> <p><b>Peter Winfield</b>, Runnymede Borough Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a result of Covid-19 Runnymede has worked with Grounds Maintenance contractor, Burleys, to reduce the number of grass cuts in parks and open spaces which has had the positive result</li> </ul>	



of a greater number of wildflowers being seen.

- One of our main concerns is the impact on parks income, with no football, cricket or bowls for the foreseeable future, cafes and car parks closed, events cancelled and commercial tenants not operating, we have no parks income at all.
- Some of the GreenSpace team have been redeployed to supporting vulnerable members of the community, others working shorter hours, so we are focusing on essential tasks only. Concern now about manual parks staff coming back to full time work and measures required to keep them safe.
- Have stopped all volunteer work parties and interested to know what others are thinking about re-starting them (to speak to Helen separately about this).
- Chertsey Meads SANG designation slightly delayed by NE requiring further amendment to the SANGS Management Plan.
- Sad news that Dr John Pontin passed away in April.

**Isabel Cordwell, Runnymede Policy:**

- Chertsey Meads – in discussions with Natural England to designate as SANG
- TBH SPA – revision of supplementary planning document just begun.
- Green & Blue Infrastructure SPD – initial draft received from consultant for review, final draft anticipated at the end of June. BNG currently set at 10% minimum.

**Ross Baker, Lynn Whitfield, Surrey Bat Group**

- Note the BCT Woodland Symposium in Woking has been postponed to 20/11/20.
- The BCT SE England Bat Conference will be at the same venue on 21/11/20 (bookings not yet open).
- Bat group trapping and radio-tracking surveys planned to start this month have been postponed following IUCN/BCT advice, which is based partly on the difficulty in human social distancing and travel restrictions, but also on the uncertainty about how easily Covid-19 could be transmitted from humans to bats. CIEEM has just issued general guidance on ecological surveys which includes the IUCN advice and link to BCT advice on bats: <https://cieem.net/resource/guidance-on-ecological-survey-and-assessment-in-the-uk-during-the-covid-19-outbreak/>.
- Natural England has consulted SBG about plans for some tree removal along the A3 at Thursley NNR: as this is both uncomfortably close to some of our bat boxes and close to where we radio-tracked a Barbastelle last year (thus felling might affect bats' ability to cross the A3), we hope to be able to get out to do some detector surveys of the area soon, in advance of felling.
- Non-CIEEM members might be interested in webinars they have set up to try to make up for loss of site-based meetings. These include a whole series on BNG and one just announced on road verges - these are open to non-members as well: <http://events.cieem.net/Events/EventPages/0206202000000000CreatingNewAmenityRoadVergesofValuetWildlifeTheImportanceofSoilFertility.aspx>.
- I joined our local community Facebook group recently (in case there was anything I could volunteer for during the crisis) and found a lot of people were asking about where they could pick wild garlic, with other people who clearly couldn't identify plants pointing out patches of things that weren't ramsons, including a patch of lily-of-the-valley which is poisonous! I've heard about similar things from other parts of the country. Could other members of SNP, SWT etc be encouraged to post on their local groups warning of the potential dangers to both themselves and potentially to populations of rare plants?
- Similarly re the potential dearth of older volunteers, there are plenty of younger people not working at the moment but keen to get out and about, who might be interested in helping with work parties etc where they wouldn't have before? Again they could be targeted through general local community groups as they wouldn't necessarily be part of a wildlife group.

**Simon Saville, Butterfly Conservation**

- Coronavirus lockdown impacts for BC in Surrey
  - Some local staff furloughed
  - All formal transect monitoring has been ceased (nationally)
  - Work parties on hold (across UK)
  - Most project work has had to be stopped



- All events cancelled for the time being (e.g. field trip programme)
- Online alternatives being considered, e.g. for New Members' Day
- To be reviewed following PM's announcement 9 May
- Reports that Wood Whites are doing well this year at Chiddingfold
- Also good numbers of Grizzled and Dingy Skippers at many sites (e.g. Denbies Hillside)
- OPM: we are concerned that FC is continuing its treatment programme this season, especially given that;
  - OPM is accepted as being established in the south east; eradication is not possible
  - Little evidence that the control programme is halting the spread of OPM
  - Little or no evidence of defoliation of oaks (some evidence of increased stress on some trees)
  - Clear evidence of risks to biodiversity (not just in SSSIs); BC is working with FC to produce data to guide actions
  - Weak evidence of cases of harm to human health (most cases seem to be from arb workers carrying out OPM control)
  - Some landowners cannot afford to comply with SPHNs
- BC recognises the need to manage OPM nests in certain circumstances (see Policy [here](#)), but have voiced these concerns to FC.
- BC thinks it would be useful for the BWG to prepare a **Position Paper** on "OPM in Surrey and its control" and would be happy to work with others on this topic and this approach is supported by **JE**. This would of course pertain to the plans for next season.

**Georgina Terry, Natural England**

- New round of Countryside Stewardship open for business for agreements to start in 2021.
- GT back full time with the land management team in Surrey. NE looking at improving our evidence base of SSSI's for desk based opportunities to assess condition. Anyone with useful sets of data they wish to share to help look at increasing evidence to enable us to look at condition whilst we're locked in.
- OPM – limited consenting, especially where invertebrate feature of interest on SSSI's.
- Marian Spain has been confirmed as Natural England CE; which we are all really pleased about.

**David Olliver, Waverley Borough Council**

- David was defeated by the technology but asks, "I am currently starting to write a Biodiversity Policy for WBC and so any examples and versions the members are happy to share with me would be greatly appreciated. I am sure you and the members have some wonderful biodiversity policies that I can gain a great deal of information from.."

**Stewart Cocker, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council**

- The EEBC Covid-19 response has impacted management of Council owned land as follows: cancellation of all volunteer activities, initial significant reduction in grass cutting in open spaces and no verge cutting (Resumed wc 11<sup>th</sup> May), partial redeployment of staff involved in grounds maintenance and countryside management to help with delivery of hot meals to vulnerable residents, reduced biological monitoring effort and grazing on Epsom Common LNR delayed until at least July 2020. In addition many staff are working from home and some have had to self-isolate due to underlying health conditions.
- A Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship application was submitted in April 2020 for Epsom Common LNR to follow on from 2010-2020 Environmental Stewardship agreement.
- The verges have been causing a stir in recent weeks as the reduction in cutting has allowed them to very noticeably bloom! This has catalysed a lot of comment and at EEBC we have decided that in re-submitting a bid for cutting and collection machinery, we are also photographing the verges in bloom and if at all possible surveying some, to build a stronger more persuasive case for making what is a significant change, if cutting and collecting becomes the new normal.
- The LBAP 2020-2030 is in advanced draft stage and will be taken to committee in the Autumn.
- The South East Rivers Trust have been awarded 200k from the Coca-Cola replenish programme a partnership between WWK UK and the Rivers Trust for the creation of a wetland at

**ALL**



Chambers Mead in the Hogsmill LNR. This sum means the project can almost certainly proceed and further funding bids are looking hopeful.

- Although grazing on Epsom Common for summer 2020 is currently postponed due to Covid-19 plans are being made to try and commence grazing later in the summer.
- Our biological monitoring has been severely curtailed by Covid-19 but our butterfly transects are still in operation via our staff who walk them as part of their daily exercise.
- GCN eggs were discovered on aquatic plant in the margins of Round Pond at Nonsuch Park, the first records since the 1990's. This is post recent restoration efforts where the Lower Mole Partnership vols erected a fence and opened up the southern aspect of the pond to allow more light in to improve the chances of marginal vegetation flourishing. The discovery prompted the locking of the pedestrian gate from March through to June to protect GCN from disturbance by dogs. Signs explaining the decision have been posted with so far only one difficult/disgruntled dog walker to report.

**Helen Cocker, Surrey Countryside Partnerships**

- All volunteer tasks have been cancelled.
- Downlands Partnership: grazing team self-isolated at our farm to insure livestock welfare during lambing (93 lambs), grazing still taking place across various sites as normal with volunteer stock checkers continuing to help.
- Lower Mole Partnership: continuing to jump through hoops to get the Rye Brook Project off the ground, hoping a contractor can do the work in late June.
- Surrey Heathland Partnership: preparing contracts for summer spraying. Dealing with gates left open as public don't want to touch them even when there are livestock on site!

**Lisa Creaye-Griffin, Surrey Nature Partnership Director**

- The SE group of Local Nature Partnerships, which comprises, Surrey, East and West Sussex, Hants and Isle of Wight and the South Downs National Park Authority are meeting regularly to ensure a united message to the public and Government.
- Unfortunately Parliamentary reception planned for 28<sup>th</sup> April had to be cancelled so we have been working on a different way of engaging MPs. The job now is to promote our message on Nature based solutions which definitely chimes with the need to establish an economic recovery, reduce our impact on climate change and ensure the current increase in outdoor recreation becomes a habit.
- We will also be working with the LEPs to embed that thinking in their future strategies.

**Steve Price, Spelthorne Borough Council**

- Due to increased footfall on specific sites (Sunbury Park) grazing regimes have been delayed until later in the year – urban fringe sites experiencing greater usage.
- Strategic works (BAP) have been put on hold whilst staff are temporarily re-deployed to frontline services.
- Trialling direct drilling of wildflower seed along sections of two road verges – 3 yr vision to implement along the entire stretch.
- River (Ash) enhancement projects progressing – contractor confident works may still go-ahead this summer as planned. Subject to future government guidance.
- Reviewing of council Tree policy and planting regime which a view towards favoured species.
- Increase of unlawful activities onsite ie motorbikes and dogs off leads on SSSI during nesting season.
- No volunteer activities currently taking place.

**Simon Elson, Surrey County Council**

- Molesey – Held further meeting with Thames Water. Looking to clear lines on all outstanding Planning matters.
- Tice's Meadow – sale is still ongoing
- C2C work on Holmesdale been ongoing. Also held Sibelco community tree planting day that very well represented organisationally at a local level.
- RTS – nothing to report. Gone very quiet.



5.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Team that brought you the Biodiversity and Planning conference continues to meet planning event for next year, probably February.</li></ul> <p><b>Date of next meeting:</b></p> <p><b>Monday 8th July 2020</b> 14:00-17:00, Video Conference using Microsoft Teams</p> <p><b>Abbreviata:</b> EEBC - Epsom &amp; Ewell; EBC - Elmbridge; GBC - Guildford; MVDC - Mole Valley; RBBC- Reigate &amp; Banstead; RBC - Runnymede; SBC - Spelthorne; WoBC - Woking; SCC - Surrey County; NFM - Natural Flood Management; NR - Nature Reserve; NE - Natural England; NT - National Trust; RAWI - Revised Ancient Woodland Survey; SANGS - Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space; SLSP - Surrey Local Sites Partnership; TBH - Thames Basin Heaths</p>	
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