



Biodiversity Working Group Video Conference using Microsoft Teams Wednesday 8th July 2020

Minutes

1.	Present:	John Edwards (SCC/Deputy Chair); Helen Cocker (Surrey Countryside Partnerships); Stewart Cocker (EEBC); Simon Elson (SCC); Ross Baker/Lynn Whitfield (Surrey Bat Group); Georgina Terry (Natural England); Isabel Cordwell; (RBC); Mike Coates (RSPB); Steve Price (SpBC); Simon Saville (Butterfly Conservation); David Watts (R&BBC); Francesca Taylor (Environment Agency); Ann Sankey (SBS); Rod Shaw (Mole Valley DC); Rachel Coburn (Surrey CC); Dave Page(Elmbridge BC); Bill Stanworth(SBS); Mike Hordley(SBIC); Mike Waite (SWT); Vivienne Riddle (Tandridge DC).	
	Apologies:	Lisa Creaye-Griffin (SyNP Director); Bill Budd (British Dragonfly Society); Jo Heisse (Environment Agency); Lara Beattie, Arran Henderson, Tracey Haskins(WoBC); Alistair Kirk (Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre); Leigh Thornton (Surrey Wildlife Trust); Jack Thompson (RSPB); Henri Brocklebank (SxWT); Peter Winfield (RBC); Susan Medcalf (Surrey Botanical Society); Dan Knowles (GBC)	
2.	The minutes of the meeting of 11th May 2020 were agreed, see here .		Action
3.	Matters Arising:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of SNCI selection criteria. No further action on this as yet, but JE is to meet SJC to scope and cost this. A SLSP meeting is long overdue (May 2017). Likely to take place by video conferencing. • Copthorne Meadows SNCI; AS advised that SJC has a new contact at Tandridge DC; JE to follow up. • Surrey 'Irreplaceable Habitats' guidance; comments to MW by new deadline of 31/07. • SBIC; AK now concentrating on strategic work, including re-starting Surrey Habitat Framework project and gaining ALERC accreditation, while MH will be managing day-to-day LRC matters. 	<p>JE</p> <p>JE</p>
4.	Working Group Priorities 2020:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Golf Courses advocacy; MC stated RSPB had employed Dr Marie Athorn as a Business Conservation Advisor to the Golf Industry to promote course management sustainability. Is interested in focus in Surrey as most 'golf-coursed' county nationally. • BWG is asked to consider their respective reportage of progress towards Bio2020/BOA targets for Biodiversity 2029 report, see; summary here. MW will likely be drafting a report in early 2021, & respond into any Defra reporting call as required. 	All
5.	Partner Updates;	<p>Francesca Taylor, Environment Agency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wey weirs refurbishment project Weir refurbishments now largely complete – still some work to do at Broadmead and Millmead weirs. Fish-passes (legal requirement of the weir refurb) are due to be delivered at Walsham and Abbey weirs this year. Planning decision on Walsham bypass channel is due imminently. Fish-passes at Hamm and Millmoor weirs (adjacent to Broadmead) will be delivered next year. Millmead weir refurb and fish-pass has been delayed following the collapse of an adjacent weir on Millmead island last year. The legal requirement for a fish-pass now falls to both the EA and the owner of the collapsed weir, confirmation of which is due shortly, • Burpham Court farm fish-pass & wetland design project We've been working with GBC and Atkins to develop designs for a natural fish bypass channel around NT's weir and wetland improvements across Burpham Court Farm. The surrounding areas of the site have been designated as SANG. The project has been delayed due to water quality issues (very high ammonia levels) associated with an adjacent historic landfill – Atkins will be investigating this problem shortly and we should have completed designs by Oct/Nov this 	



year. Thames Water is also about to submit a planning application for Slyfield STW which will involve aligning a new outfall pipe through the wetland site – due to meet with TW shortly.

- **Hell Ditch enhancement & Tilford fish pass project**

About to award a contract for 400m of enhancements on the Hell Ditch upstream of the Lammas Lands in Godalming. A fish-pass was installed on the Hell Ditch in 2018 and we therefore want to improve this channel's attractiveness for fish. This contract will also involve installing bristles onto Tilford gauging weir to enable fish passage. Construction is planned for Oct/Nov this year.

- **Byfleet (Lower Wey) Flood Alleviation Scheme**

Preferred option is a flood embankment at Sanway, removal/modification of Byfleet weir and a suite of environmental enhancements (restoration of 2-3km of river channel, creation of ponds/backwaters/scrapes/ditches, improvements to public access, fish passage at Broadoak weir, etc.). A workshop was held in Jan to explore opportunities for environmental enhancements in the Sanway area. Jacobs (design consultants) have since produced a Concept Plan for the area based on the feedback from the workshop and discussions with key landowners – Woking BC, SWT and RHS Wisley. Jacobs have also carried out some high level appraisal work on Byfleet weir – our preferred option is to remove the impounding effect of Byfleet weir to enable fish passage but we need to balance this with the landowner's requirements and any heritage constraints associated with adjacent Listed Buildings. Presently in process of agreeing a new contract with Jacobs to complete outline designs for Byfleet weir and the environmental enhancements; should be complete by May 2021. Detailed design and planning will follow after this with construction planned for 2022-23.

- **Guildford Flood Alleviation Scheme**

Debbie Cousins now leading on this for Biodiversity. Preferred option is still to be confirmed but the project is currently looking at flood walls through Guildford town centre, in addition to upstream flood storage. Jacobs have recently completed an NFM viability report with the conclusion that NFM is unlikely to be part of the options to reduce flood risk for Guildford town centre. This is partly because GBC requires a 1/100yr. Standard of Protection and most NFM measures are not suitable for large order events. There has been some discussion internally about setting-up a new Surrey-wide NFM project – I will update the group as this progresses. Project will also include delivering two fish-passes at Riff Raff weir and Unstead weir on the Wey – have been in discussion with Georgina Terry about these as they're both within SSSIs. Project will need to deliver 20% Biodiversity Net Gain and therefore they'll also be looking at other ecological enhancements – welcome ideas.

- **River Thames Scheme (RTS)**

Development Consent Order to be submitted in 2022. New ecological survey programme is currently being developed to re-fresh previous habitat, protected species and invasive species surveys. Surveys due to start shortly. One of the channel sections (the most upstream one) has now been removed from the project due to funding constraints.

- **Stage Zero river restoration**

Listened into a really interesting webinar on Stage Zero River Restoration recently (12/05). A recording of the webinar is available for anyone that's interested: <https://www.europarc-ai.org/seminars-webinars/next-webinar/>.

- **Guildford Local Plan Part 2**

Recently consulted on this. Really good to see a commitment for 20% Biodiversity Net Gain. Didn't feel that watercourses had been adequately covered so have recommended a policy specifically on watercourses and their riparian corridors. Ideally, all Local Plans would include a policy on watercourses to ensure the risks and opportunities are adequately addressed, e.g. buffers to developments, de-culverting, removal of redundant weirs, etc.

Ross Baker, Lynn Whitfield, Surrey Bat Group

- SBG trapping and radio-tracking surveys are still on hold due to the pandemic.
- SBG's barbastelle radio-tracking study from August 2019 is reported in the first issue of a new journal, *British Islands Bats*, along with a number of other articles from bat groups: available to download from: <https://www.bats.org.uk/resources/accessing-journal-papers/british-islands-bats>
- Natural England plans for tree removal along the A3 at Thursley NNR (Rodborough Common): RB and LW did a detector survey of the area on 1/7/20 and found Barbastelle foraging within a clearing for about 20 minutes. Follow-up surveys in the surrounding area are being carried out to try to pinpoint flight paths and in particular where bats cross the A3. During scoping for the



survey a walk along the A3 brought home the very high noise levels and how well the SBG bat boxes are screened from this by trees (boxes are occupied by >100 noctules during winter.) SBG have therefore suggested to NE that they will need to consider the potential impacts of the felling in terms of roost disturbance very carefully. Worst case, the boxes may need to be moved away from the A3, which would probably require an EPS licence.

- Hopkins Reeds: SBG are assisting (by providing bat surveys) a group of Sandhills residents opposing two retrospective applications in Waverley (WA/2020/0661 and 2), where a builder has been systematically hollowing out an area of ancient woodland to create a yard for the storage and processing of materials, machinery and waste. This appears to have been going on over some 30 years, without WaBC enforcement, but has recently been exacerbated by construction of an access track for HGVs using imported waste.
- Betchworth Limekilns: RB and LW were contacted by PCSO David Sadler on 17/06, advising that the fire brigade had dealt with a large wood fire next to the upper bank of kilns, which fortunately is only used by bats in winter. They subsequently attended a site meeting with David Sadler and the tenant responsible, Tom Furlonger (Furlonger Tree Services) plus three other police officers including the local beat and rural crimes officers. The tenant claimed he was unaware of the bats and necessary licencing, and undertook to avoid burning or other potentially disturbing activities near the kilns pending licensing. He also has plans to fence the site more securely and asked that SBG contact him for access prior to hibernation checks.
- CIEEM webinars include one on Designing Biodiversity Net Gain for Bats on 30 July. This is to coincide with the launch of a technical note on the subject by BCT.

Simon Saville, Butterfly Conservation

- Black Hairstreaks seen on Epsom Common, from 28/05-15/06. Their native, established distribution is restricted to a small number of sites between Oxford and Peterborough, so this is a surprise. There were multiple sightings, up to 1km-plus apart. It's likely the result of a release (some years ago?), but there seems to be a breeding colony with egg laying females. BC will monitor.
- Many butterflies have emerged early, following the hot April/May - and were doing well. More recently, high winds have blighted Purple Emperors. Records from last weekend onwards are particularly welcomed (iRecord).
- BC has now resumed UKBMS butterfly monitoring: we estimate that a little over half of Surrey transects are now being walked. BC will be resuming work parties (Sept?), following its own guidelines but also complying with the rules of partners – NT, SWT, LPAs, Lower Mole. Have been monitoring the progress of the Small Blue post-project. 2020 is the first year in which the success or otherwise of the project can be gauged. There is good news in that new sites have been occupied on the North Downs and some existing colonies appear to be expanding.

Ann Sankey, Surrey Botanical Society

- MV Local Plan: AS commented on this in February and encouraged other SBS members in MV to do the same.
- Copthorne Meadows (see 2.). Note from Sarah Jane, 05/20: *"I had a very positive meeting with the new CE of Tandridge DC who I think is very open to a different way of doing things and they also have 20% as their target figure for BNG within the draft Local Plan. Given that the housing market is likely to slow certainly in the short term I wonder if it may provide us with an opportunity to do something different here."*
- Golf course recording – Lockdown has provided an excellent opportunity to record on golf courses in safety. With access, there is scope for a lot more recording as the roughs can be very valuable habitats.
- Hampton Estate's Woodland Creation Scheme – we emphasised the importance/location of the existing grasslands within the North Downs BOA, the SNP PoS on tree planting, the Lawton Report on linking habitats and the suitability of the site for the AONB ELMS trial.
- We noted the deleterious effect of too many people invading the countryside without even the basic knowledge of how to behave. For example, families have been photographed cycling through Fames Rough, other children were only just prevented from damaging the important



chalk pit on Merrow Downs, groups have been seen picnicking in fields at Outwood and there has been general trampling of further sites for Chalk Fragrant-orchid on Box Hill. With these excess numbers, there is perhaps an urgent need for all organisations involved to give **very clear** messages to the public about acceptable behaviour. This includes NT which sadly does not appear to get involved with BWG.

- The Thursley Common NNR fire: the main effect seems to be in the mire south of the main boardwalk which was quite dry at the time. This is the site of some rare plant species.
- We have received reports of excessive mowing of verges in the Redhill and Reigate areas, even when the verges were in full flower and hence providing important nectar sources. This rather goes against the idea of bringing biodiversity into urban areas.
- Earlswood Common: one member has recorded this site, mainly a former golf course, and we will send these records to Dave Watts.
- All of the planned Field Meetings for 2020 have been cancelled but individual recording is encouraged where safe to do so.

Bill Stanworth (Chair Surrey Botanical Society)

- As well as being Chairman of SBS I am a member of Friends of Normandy Wildlife (FNW), looking after the groups records. Improving biodiversity is therefore very high on my list of priorities. You'll be pleased to hear that FNW have put Swift boxes on the eaves of Normandy Village Hall (Manor Fruit Farm) and Swift vocalisations are being played to attract them. So far they have been seen on the grounds in good numbers and so we are very hopeful the boxes will be used.

Stewart Cocker (Epsom and Ewell Borough Council)

- The EEBC Grounds Maintenance Team organised a demonstration of a small ride-on grass cut-&-collect machine with a view to possible purchase for roadside and open space verge management. Serious consideration is being given to investing in cutting and collection machinery.
- The Countryside Team have been asked to write the follow-on management plans for both Nonsuch Park and Epsom Downs. Senior Countryside officer Sarah Clift is already hard at work.
- The nationally rare Black Hairstreak butterfly was discovered on Epsom Common in the late spring. Butterfly Conservation and natural England have been informed and expert opinion is that this will definitely be an unofficial introduction although the colony may have been present for several years. Luckily the location within the grazed pasture woodland provides suitable habitat. There is a possibility Epsom Common now has all the UK hairstreaks; the hunt is now on for White-letter hairstreak!
- The hugely increased visitor numbers on Epsom Common as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown and reports of problems elsewhere in the county have resulted in a decision not to graze in 2020. It is hoped that a fallow year may bring with it some botanical benefits in particular. In an effort to educate the many new visitors, three plywood cut out cows have been placed in the grazed areas to inform that grazing would normally take place over the summer and will return in 2021. Sadly one of the cows had its head kicked off on Sunday.

Helen Cocker (Surrey Countryside Partnerships)

- Surrey Countryside Partnerships have just been given permission to restart their volunteer tasks, so the Lower Mole, Downlands and Sanderstead-Whytleafe area volunteers should all be back running a limited volunteer programme by the end of July. We are only advertising the activities to our existing regular volunteers as we are currently restricted to groups of 5 volunteers, plus a member of staff.
- In the meantime some of the SCP staff have been out as a small group carrying out tasks such as Himalayan balsam pulling at Earlswood Common, Redhill and West End Common, Esher.
- Lower Mole Partnership: still jumping through more hoops to get the Kestrel Field Project on the go on the Rye Brook at Ashted, now hoping the contractor can start work in August.
- Downlands Partnership: hot, dry spring weather meant that the grazing team went straight from lambing into shearing, all now completed, including shearing for other local sheep owners, such as the City of London.
- Surrey Heathland Partnership: grazing by privately owned Icelandic ponies has continued, and



	<p>grazing by SWT cattle has now started after delay due to visitor pressure on Woking BC sites, and herbicide contracts to deal with invasive bracken and gorse are now underway.</p> <p>Steve Price (Spelthorne Borough Council)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contractor agreed for Fordbridge River Ash project, creation of 'Pocket Nature Reserve' with works to commence mid-August 2020 encompassing in-channel and riparian enhancements. • Finalising tenders with Groundwork south for River Ash, Ashford project with a plan to commence works September- October 2020. Plans to formally have the site classified as a LNR post works. • Look to shift grazing regimes on sites which have experienced heavy footfall during lockdown, August – November grazing ie Sunbury Park. • Concluding budgets (Colne Valley) and procedures for a project focused towards favourable Brown Galingale habitat on Shortwood Common SSSI. • Working alongside Thames Water and Groundwork south to implement Swift (and/or bat) posts around reservoirs. • Currently rewriting SBC tree policy. <p>Simon Elson (Surrey County Council)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued input working in partnership with SWT in the Holmesdale BOA on Coast to Capital initiative. • Ongoing work on EA River Thames Scheme (RTS). Stressed opportunity this presents for providing, and linking existing, floodplain grassland communities. • Continued participation on SCC's Tree Planting Working Group, stressing SNP's right trees, right tree approach. Recent consultation for tree planting proposal on Hogs Back a good case study and opportunity to apply such a maxim. • Chair a meeting from members of this Working Group concerned with getting volunteer activity going again. • Ongoing work on preparing for second Surrey Biodiversity & Planning Conference to be held February 18th 2021. <p>Rod Shaw (Mole Valley District Council)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MV Draft Local Plan. The Regulation 18 consultation was completed just as lockdown began and the local plans team has used the last few months to catalogue and analyse around 4,000 responses. The Council has agreed an interim update to the Local Development Scheme in the light of the uncertainties faced during the current pandemic. It is not expected that a Regulation 19 Plan will be produced this year. • I am meeting shortly to discuss district licencing with Natural England who seem to want to roll this out across Surrey. There is a meeting organised on 30/07 which will involve other Surrey LPAs, except Woking. I'm aware of SARG's unease regarding district licencing so we will have to see how that goes and how it is proposed to design the system. • We have experienced significant anti-social behaviour since the easing of lockdown, for example on the River Mole at Fetcham Splash, where large numbers of young people gather. The problems are very similar to those recorded elsewhere: litter, damage from the use of disposable barbecues, lack of social distancing etc. A number of JAG meetings have taken place with various agencies to try to resolve these issues. • The Surrey Tree Strategy includes a policy relating to grass cutting on highway verges. The result has been a more selective spring cut on many of our road verges. As always, whatever the regime, there is a mixed reaction, but this seems to be a positive move forward. There is no cut and collect arrangement at the moment and although there is a reference to Plantlife's 'Blue' campaign, which marks verges of biodiversity importance, it is not clear how this operates in practice. SCC is encouraging volunteers to undertake low-level maintenance, including the removal of grass arisings, and offering training. 	
6.	<p>DoNM: Wednesday 16th September 2020 14:00-16:30, Video Conference using Microsoft Teams</p>	
	<p>Abbreviated: EEBC - Epsom & Ewell; EBC - Elmbridge; GBC - Guildford; MVDC - Mole Valley; RBBC- Reigate & Banstead; RBC - Runnymede; SBC - Spelthorne; WoBC - Woking; SCC - Surrey County; NFM -</p>	



Surrey Nature Partnership

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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
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