



Biodiversity Working Group Video Conference using Microsoft Teams Wednesday 16th September 2020

Minutes

1.	Present:	<p>Mike Waite (SWT/Chair); John Edwards (SCC); Helen Cocker (Surrey Countryside Partnerships); Stewart Cocker (EEBC); Simon Elson (SCC); Ross Baker/Lynn Whitfield (Surrey Bat Group); Isabel Cordwell; (RBC); Steve Price (SpBC); Simon Saville (Butterfly Conservation); Ann Sankey (SBS); Rod Shaw (Mole Valley DC); Dave Page(Elmbridge BC); Mike Hordley(SBIC); Vivienne Riddle (Tandridge DC). Lara Beattie (WoBC; Peter Winfield (RBC); Susan Medcalf (Surrey Botanical Society); Heather Richards (RSPB)</p>	
	Apologies:	<p>Lisa Creaye-Griffin (SyNP Director); Tracey Haskins (WoBC); Georgina Terry (Natural England); Mike Coates (RSPB); Francesca Taylor (Environment Agency)</p>	
2.	The minutes of the meeting of 8th July 2020 were agreed, see here .		Action
3.	Matters Arising:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of SNCI selection criteria. JE has spoken and scoped this with SJC. A SLSP meeting is still possible and likely to take place by video conferencing. MW repeats his advice for Surrey's specialist species authorities to not wait and begin reviewing the criteria for their various groups. For these, see here. If you are working on these, please let JE know in order for him to track progress. MW to also sketch out a possible timeline to completion. • Copthorne Meadows SNCI; JE now has all data from SBIC and will discuss present status, threats and any enforcement issues further with VR. • Surrey 'Irreplaceable Habitats' guidance; now finalised and issued, and available on SNP website here. 	<p>All specialists/ MW JE/VR</p>
4.	Discussion and approval of SNP 20% Biodiversity Net Gain Position Statement (latest draft circulated as Paper A).	<p>Various comments received already: From LC-G – is happy with current draft following a few changes. SBG had some useful comments, and MW addressed the group with his proposed accommodation of those.</p> <p>A comment received from SWT Planning Services challenges the realism of expecting LPAs to require &/or developers to realise 20%, when govt. guidance indicates only 10%. Also cites fact that BNG uses habitat as proxy to measure total gain, so any required species-related compensation would effectively be adding % to this. JE reacted with observation that 20 years of BAP-type action has failed to halt biodiversity losses, therefore over-ambition is now even more appropriate and justified. A NE comment received also supports 20% recommendation, and reflects if even this is enough. HR - could add something/ signpost to guidance on BNG achievement? JE – we could aspire to draft separate guidance here, for some point in the future. SE – fully supportive of >20%, as post-minerals restoration routinely exceeds this, and without some emphasis/qualification of how need for 'additionality' ought to automatically exclude such sites, developments could very easily cover-off their 10% BNG requirement by buying into 'offsets' as offered by departing minerals companies already committed/engaged in habitat creation & restoration. Other members also indicated support for maintaining our proposed 20% position on the BNG issue. A new draft reflecting this discussion will now be circulated for approval, by MW by end-September, with intent to sign-off remotely by mid-October or at the very latest before the next meeting.</p> <p>IC; Wanted to discuss colleagues' thoughts on Habitat Banking for BNG. Still early days on various possible models around off-setting, but MW mentioned the nascent Holmesdale BOA BNG pilot where SWT is hoping to lead on 'front-loaded' BNG as an investable product for off-site developers. SE reminded us of the relevance, especially in this area, of his above comment, where there is a major ongoing interest in minerals extraction. HR – will come down to robust recording/registration of circumstances under which net gain is achieved, and then its ability to be traded as off-sets. For example, habitat gained as a condition of planning permission clearly wouldn't be tradeable. That, and</p>	<p>All/ MW</p>



	<p>the preferred method of securing agreements as covenants, should prevent abuses of 'additionality'. Certainly, advanced investable BNG off-sets would be one way to ensure these are realised in the preferred locations, ie. BOAs. SE – perhaps GI Strategies are the best place to articulate this opportunity and relationship clearly (several LPAs have begun work on these, inc. Guildford, MV, Runnymede). SM – national habitat network maps are available now on MAGIC, as a complement to BOAs. JE – warns of inaccuracies with this as reliant on national PHI, with all its acknowledged shortcomings. This further exposes urgency for completion of the bespoke (Surrey) Integrated Habitat Framework, which is now progressing well under direction of AK (SBIC).</p>	
<p>5.</p>	<p>Update on SNP Tree planting Position Statement 'best practice' supplement</p> <p>MW reminded of the origin and intention of this; a best practice document using case-studies to illustrate the good and bad of tree-planting schemes (and indeed those showing elements of both), as a supplement to the Tree Planting Position Statement. Progressing this had been stalled by COVID, but remains an important deliverable. JE suggested MW circulate a 'template'/example to harness interest and ensure consistency in submission of case-studies. MW to action this by end-October, and set further deadline for submission.</p>	<p>MW</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Partner Updates;</p> <p>Francesca Taylor, Environment Agency (absent)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hell Ditch enhancement and Tilford fish pass project. We've awarded Land and Water the contract to carry out approx 400m of enhancements (gravel riffles, berms, deflectors) on the Hell Ditch upstream of the Lammas Lands in Godalming. A fish pass was installed on the Hell Ditch in 2018 and therefore we want to improve the habitat for fish. This contract will also involve installing bristles onto Tilford gauging weir to enable fish passage . Met with landowners at both sites who are in support. Construction is planned for Nov this year, weather dependent. • Send Marsh Flood Alleviation Scheme. An existing flood defence alongside the East Clandon stream in Send Marsh is in need of repair. It looks like the stream was straightened when they built the Portsmouth Road and as a result has started to undermine the defence. The project team want to carry out urgent repairs this winter but will also be looking at more longer term solutions. Unfortunately there's not a huge amount of space to realign the stream as it's sandwiched between a housing estate and a main road and any realignment will probably involve the loss of some mature oak trees but there could be opportunities for NFM upstream which could also help to address WFD failures associated with diffuse pollution. Any local knowledge of the area would be welcome. • Byfleet Flood Alleviation Scheme. Jacobs are due to be awarded the contract for the next phase of work next week – this will involve completing the Outline Business Case for the scheme with a particular focus on Byfleet weir (potential removal/lowering), Broadoak fish pass and various wetland/river habitat enhancements in Manor Farm and Common Meadows. 5 bat roosts (at least two maternity roosts - soprano and common pipistrelle) have been recorded along the proposed flood defence alignment. Jacobs will be looking to revise the alignment to avoid impacting these roosts. <p>Ross Baker, Lynn Whitfield, Surrey Bat Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural England plans for tree removal along the A3 at Thursley NNR (Rodborough Common): surveys either side of the road showed Barbastelles foraging and commuting over both Thursley and Witley Commons, including some registrations right on the roadsides. The Thursley warden, James Giles, has confirmed that plans for felling have not advanced due to work generated by the Covid-19 pandemic and recent wildfires. SBG will be consulted when they resume planning. • Hopkins Reeds: static detectors registered Barbastelles using the woodland. (Also a check of our records shows that during Frank Greenaway's radio tracking of bats from the Ebernoe SAC in 2008, Barbastelles were recorded as far north as this woodland.) • Removal of bat boxes from Combe Bottom in 2019, to allow felling of trees with Ash dieback: the Natterer's colony that used the boxes seems to have established itself in the new boxes in West Hanger. As the boxes could not be opened for checking because of potential Covid-19 risk to bats, thermal imaging cameras were used in August/September to locate boxes containing bats, followed by emergence surveys using infrared cameras. Brown long-eared bats 	



are also using at least one box.

- **Clandon Mansion:** NT recently asked us to advise on potential bat use of the burned-out building prior to restoration work commencing. Droppings found scattered throughout were sent for DNA analysis and Common pipistrelle, Brown long-eared bat and Barbastelle identified. A static bat detector has been left in the building to collect further background data but the Trust has been advised to engage a consultant asap. Early results show significant activity of all three species.

Simon Saville, Butterfly Conservation

- Butterfly numbers dropped sharply after the extreme heat in late August. However, 17 species were reported over the weekend of 12-13 Sept - all 3 whites, Brimstone, Meadow Brown, Speckled Wood, Comma, Red Admiral, Small Blue, Common Blue, Adonis Blue, Chalkhill Blue, Brown Argus, Small Heath, Small Copper, Brown Hairstreak, and quite a few migrant Clouded Yellows. The Brown Hairstreaks were noted at Denbies Hillside, Mellow, and Horton Country Park, plus Hutchinson's Bank in London. Evidence continues to suggest that the Brown Hairstreak is extending its range.
- A Camberwell Beauty was reported at Ash (25 Mar). We also had reports of Marsh Fritillaries and Duke of Burgundy, presumed to be unofficial releases. A Short-tailed Blue was seen at Rotherhithe, also assumed to be a release.
- About 145k counts were submitted for the Big Butterfly Count (in July-Aug), up 25%. Nearly 112k citizen scientists participated (similar to last year). Over 1.5m butterflies were counted, similar to last year, which was boosted by 420k Painted Lady sightings.
- The top 5 species accounted for nearly ¾ of all sightings: Lge White 291k, Sm White 284k, Gatekeeper 195k, Peacock 171k and Meadow Brown 158k. A significant migration boosted numbers of the Lge White (+152k), and possibly the Sm White (+104k). There were fewer Peacocks (-37k), possibly due to the heat. There was no large migration of the Painted Lady.
- BC Surrey resumed its field trip programme in July, observing Covid restrictions. We had more new members than usual. A Wall Brown was reported at Colley Hill, Reigate on 28 July (no photo).
- Conservation work parties are restarting (with Covid restrictions) on the North Downs for the Small Blue and at Oaken Wood (Chiddingfold). The latter is integrated into the Wood White project, led by Fiona Haynes.

Ann Sankey, Surrey Botanical Society

- SBS has moved forward with the suggested project to achieve a modern Species-Rich Grasslands Inventory for the county, which would emulate the Ancient Woodland Inventory and act as a stimulus for further survey to identify all such sites. These might then find additional protective credibility, under-pinned by the 'Irreplaceable Habitats' policy and interpretive guidance offered through the NPPF.
- Wildwood GC – Alfold, abandoned and has recently been surveyed. Holds some interesting flora.

Heather Richards (RSPB)

- Golf Course Project Officer Marie Athorn to be linked/introduced to MW.
- Farnham Woods NR – tree thinning has recently taken place there.

Isabel Cordwell (Runnymede BC)

- Local Plan now adopted; Green & Blue Infrastructure SPD is presently in draft – to be consulted on at some point in future.

John Edwards (SCC)

- Plans progressing for a second Biodiversity & Planning Conference in early 2021, will be either real or virtual.
- Has been busy with the M25 J10 Improvement Scheme - negotiating various agreements for compensation package. **RB** (SBG) – has the San Dominico restaurant been included here? Hosts a Long-eared Bat roost, which will need to be addressed as this area intended for a construction compound. **JE** to report back on this.

Mike Hordley (SBIC)

- SBIC maintains normal service; demand for data searches is down on last year but is



understandable.

Lara Beattie (Woking BC)

- WoBC's Great Crested Newt project is in its fourth year of planned habitat improvements. The dry spring and summer affected water levels but latest ponds are doing well. WBC and ADAS (the Council's ecologists for this project) presented to Natural England's GCN Licencing Expert Panel in April to share learning.
- WoBC submitted a proposal in August to take part in Natural England's pilot for BNG habitat enhancement projects. Hoping to hear back in Sept.
- Countryside management works continue at Hoe Valley, various heathland sites and with conservation grass cutting regimes at some meadow sites.
- Brookwood Cemetery (SNCI) masterplan was approved in June which will deliver ecological improvements to the site in keeping with its historical importance.
- Planet Woking is due to launch soon. This is a programme to raise the profile of WoBC's climate change / sustainability / biodiversity work and to engage the local community in future location action. Helen Cocker kindly participated in the launch video which will be made available via social media channels later this month.

Peter Winfield (RBC)

- Chertsey Meads now formally a SANG (=8 in total in Runnymede). 6 are run by borough which now employs a dedicated SANGs officer, funded directly from SANG tariff. With this coordination and additional funding, many of the proposed habitat enhancement projects within site management plans can be now be put in motion.
- Otherwise, parks team full out on health & safety management in open spaces.

Steve Price (Spelthorne BC)

- Fordbridge River Ash project – various in-channel enhancements, ponds and backwater restoration works is now complete.
- Colne Valley/SPC joint project, on land south of Bromsfield Prison – aspiration to be a LNR/SNCI
- Steve is leaving SBC for a new job in Bristol with NE, on GCN district licencing. Congratulations and best of luck to him with that.

Stewart Cocker (Epsom and Ewell Borough Council)

- BAP goes to committee 6/10/20 – features BNG.
- 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.
- Confirmed presence of White-letter hairstreak now completes the hairstreak 'set' on Epsom Common (nationally rare Black Hairstreak butterfly was discovered on Epsom Common in late spring).
- Local volunteers have re-started, and will continue.
- SERT moving on with the Chamber Mead wetland project in Ewell.
- Met with Eliot Newton, RB Kingston's Biodiversity Officer to discuss proposal to reintroduce Water Voles on Bonesgate Stream (RBK/E&EBC and county boundary).

Helen Cocker (Surrey Countryside Partnerships)

- Surrey Countryside Partnerships were given permission to restart their volunteer groups, so the Lower Mole, Downlands and Sanderstead-Whytleafe area volunteers have been running a limited volunteer programme using a maximum of 5 volunteers. Are hoping to increase this from 01/10; awaiting decision from SCC.
- Lower Mole Partnership: Kestrel Field Project on Rye Brook at Ashtead, slight delay – contractor should now start work in late September.
- Caterham Viewpoint OS/SNCI –Downlands Partnership hoping to recommence grazing to follow on from scrub clearance works.

Simon Elson (Surrey County Council)

- Note to all: Conservation work-parties are exempt from 'Rule of Six'.

Rod Shaw (Mole Valley District Council)



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>MV Draft Local Plan</u>. Forward Planning team continue to analyse responses to the Regulation 18 consultation was completed before lockdown. Some new sites and existing site resurveys promulgated from that. Current proposals to reform the planning system has cast some uncertainty over the housing supply target currently being used for the plan. New 'housing requirement' methodology may result in increases in the numbers of homes deemed necessary to meet demand. • <u>Net Gain</u> – relevance of discussion under (4.) above; difficult to be pre-emptive regarding a biodiversity policy for the new plan, given the uncertainty from delays to the Evt. Bill etc. • Two meetings to discuss <u>GCN district licencing</u> with Natural England, have largely extended the present uncertainty as to a way forward for Surrey. Both Natural England and Nature Space offer alternative approaches to this; SWT Planning Services has drafted a summary comparison of their merits plus a considered recommendation, which is to be taken to Surrey Planning Officers group to consider best one to use. NE will be consulting on their mapping to support their approach shortly. <p>Vivienne Riddle (Tandridge DC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still waiting the SoS Inspector's post-EiP decision on the new Tandridge Local Plan 2033. <p>Mike Waite (SWT)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chobham Common fire extended over 78 hectares in the end (30 ha of the NNR affected, mainly in the north-west). • SWT is putting together a program of virtual online guided walks and live talks programme, see website. • Planning or the Future (White Paper) TWT campaign. LC-G has asked MW to coordinate a SNP response as for the England Tree Strategy – closes 29/10 so watch this space.. 	
	<p>AoB: MW reported his recent re-discovery of the Great Fox-spider <i>Alopecosa fabrilis</i>, (Critically endangered & BAP priority/S.41 species) at its only UK site on Hankley Common. First record since 1993 and has rocked the arachnological world..!</p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p>DoNM: Wednesday 13th January 14:00-16:30, Video Conference using Zoom.</p>	
	<p>Abbreviata: EEBC - Epsom & Ewell; EBC - Elmbridge; GBC - Guildford; MVDC - Mole Valley; RBBC- Reigate & 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; SJC - Sarah Jane Chimbwandira (SNP Chair); SLSP - Surrey Local Sites Partnership; TBH - Thames Basin Heaths</p>	