



Biodiversity Working Group

Wednesday 19th January 2022: Video Conference using Zoom

Minutes:

1.	<p>Present: Mike Waite (SWT/Chair); John Edwards (SCC); Helen Cocker (Surrey Countryside Partnerships); Georgina Terry (Natural England); Lisa Creaye-Griffin (SyNP Director); Simon Elson (SCC); Ross Baker/Lynn Whitfield (Surrey Bat Group); Dave Page (Elmbridge BC); Sarah Clift, (EEBC); Rachel Coburn (SCC); Susan Medcalf, Bill Stanworth, Ann Sankey (Surrey Botanical Society); Stewart Cocker (EEBC); Vivienne Riddle TDC; Izzy Soane, Jack Thompson (RSPB)</p> <p>New member introductions; Craig Hutton (Spelthorne BC); Bill Downey (Surrey Branch-Butterfly Conservation); Paul Davey (EA Biodiversity Officer Wey Catchment); Bronwen Chinien (Natural Environment Officer, SCC).</p>	
	<p>Apologies: Alistair Kirk (SBIC); Lara Beattie (WoBC); Sarah Jane Chimbwandira (SyNP); Leigh Thornton (SWT); Jane Smith (MVBC); Helen Miller (FE ecologist); John Devonshire (RuBC); Lara Beattie (WoBC).</p>	
2.	<p>Working group governance: Group confirmed satisfaction for continuity of current Chair. Deputy chair role will be vacant as of 31/03; if interested, please contact MW.</p>	<p>Action All</p>
3.	<p>The minutes of the meeting of 12th May 2021 were agreed, see here.</p>	
4.	<p>Matters Arising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SNCI Selection Committee meeting; any progress? Still no date set for this. JE's intended retirement could be the required spur to hold one before 31/03. JE suggested that the forthcoming LNRS workstream might act as a timely vehicle for reinvigorating advocacy of Surrey's SNCI/LWS system. The review of the SNCI selection criteria needs an update from SWT Ecology Services, contracted to lead this work. Action: MW to contact Claire Gibbs of SWTES. • Biodiversity & Planning Conference 2022. On 01/03/22, in person at Dorking Halls or online. Speakers all on board, marketing & publicity in full swing. Programme and booking page is here; https://www.surreywildlifetrust.org/surreynp. Request for clarity over attendance pricing for WG members – JE to find out from Sophie Coad of SWT. • New Surrey hills AONB FiPL Fund – approval panel has met twice, funding various projects. Anticipated to move most of this FY's budget, with steady stream of fundable projects in process. 	<p>MW JE</p>
5.	<p>2011-2020 Biodiversity Action Reporting Project:</p> <p>Author/Chair had circulated the first draft with meeting papers. Compiled from members' gratefully received proformae and on-line research sources. Some feedback already received from selected consultees, but more needed/awaited. Very important for document to be as complete and accurate as possible, as will become a formal record published by the SyNP, that will be used to inform future priority habitat baseline audits, eg. in the Surrey LNRS, any local BioMetric current state assessments, etc. So, only as good as the data incorporated, so please engage in the consultation on this present draft, with comments by mid-February (15th), with the intention of a final draft to follow by end-Feb. Is already quite lengthy, so keyword searching is recommended for finding reference to your eg. borough/agency or species group (ie. using keypad Control-F).</p> <p>Question over intention to also include reference to non-S.41 'priority' species? MW agreed to include reference to most obvious of these, perhaps within a generic discussion paragraph or similar. SE argued in favour in that S.41 SPI list does represent national prioritisation, and here we have the opportunity to i) reflect the local situation, & ii) anticipate candidates for any possible review of future priorities. GT – on the compiled statistics for SSSI % Favourable condition. Recognition here that the recent elevated efforts by NE to update condition assessment falls just short of the reporting period; MW had to filter not inconsiderable number of Units now favourable, but since end-2020.</p>	<p>All</p>



	<p>Discussion in anticipation of any intended re-refresh process for BOA boundaries. The rationale for this (ie. the simple timely opportunism, plus given their age the need for an update to reflect interim land-use changes, their fitness for use in the LNRS (see below) etc.). The emerging 'Urban BOA' identification exercise being undertaken by SWT under contract to SCC, will be an obvious additional data-set to combine with this refresh.</p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p>The Future – what does 2022 hold for our sector?</p> <p>Likely business for the attention and possible involvement of the working group this year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal launch of the 'Small sites metric' is on the horizon, following Defra consultation on experience using the beta-version just closed. There is another topical Defra consultation on the proposed regulation framework for introduction of statutory net gain underway presently (see; https://consult.defra.gov.uk/defra-net-gain-consultation-team/consultation-on-biodiversity-net-gain-regulations/). MW will be responding for SWT and probably also for SNP. We are likely to see the announcement of a proposed preparatory training schedule and release of additional resources targeting LPAs as an eventual follow-up to this, later in the year. • The preparation of a statutory county Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) will start to gather pace, as led by SCC as our 'Responsible Authority'. No doubt this is already being thought about at SCC, which has now been formally offered this role. As the existing specialist forum most concerned in such matters, we can anticipate having a key seat amongst the essential stakeholder partnership required to be brought on-board in the preparation of a LNRS. The wider SENP is presently researching data requirements and their current availability across the counties making up the former South-East region, being led by South Downs NP GIS staff. • The current consultation into reviewing the Surrey Hills AONB boundary was discussed. This is due to close as an evidence gathering exercise 31/01. NE is appointing a Senior Advisor to then analyse this to draw up new draft boundaries for further consultation, representation & if necessary appeal through to completion. Although primarily a landscape heritage designation, this complements and benefits biodiversity conservation as well. See; evidence@surrey-hills-aonb-boundary-review.org. • The possibility for a field meeting of the group later in the year was discussed and approved by all. Venue offers welcome - Chair suggested perhaps the 'Woking urban greening experience', complete with nesting Peregrine falcons..? • A role for the WG in upping-the-ante in emphasising/clarifying linkages of climate crisis to the parallel ecological/biodiversity crisis was suggested, ie. to making the most of perceived solutions, eg. NFM wetland creation in flood alleviation schemes. HC – should we apply pressure on eg. SCC to declare an Ecological Emergency alongside the adopted Climate Emergency? National government has, and also a UN COP26 recommendation was to be more forthright in linking the two crises. If only to counter the resulting imbalance in resources allocated to these issues at local govt. level (SCC to appoint x20 new staff dedicated to climate resilience through delivery of their CC Plan, vs. far smaller biodiversity team). JT mentioned RSPB's work with NE on developing the revised CC Adaptation Manual taking just this type of approach, see; http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/5805611654840320. 	
<p>7.</p>	<p>Partner Updates:</p> <p>Ann Sankey (SBS);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AS is no longer BSBI Recorder for Surrey as from 01/01/22. So far no replacement has been found but Susan Medcalf will help with some conservation matters. • SBS was again invited to survey grassland on the Hampton Estate. These resulted in yet more significant finds and a general boost to the records of this area - hopefully will influence management of these fields. • Have been involved in biodiversity recording at West Horsley Place Estate, now run as a charitable trust, to provide them with records to inform their management. Another large private estate inviting recording is the Shere Woodlands Estate, some on heathland, also to inform sympathetic management. 	



- A member advised R&BBC on post-golf management of Earlswood Common which has a good population of Chamomile (S.41/Red-listed). Has also encouraged beneficial management of road verges in the area.
 - Also working with NT at Harewoods Est. at Outwood on management advice for conserving Surrey's only remaining population of Corn Buttercup (S.41/Red listed).
 - Data search for Epsom & Walton Downs to help E&EBC with their management of this important area. Nearby a member helped record the arable flora of the Northey Fields SNCI at Ewell, following JE's advice on these SCC owned fields.
 - Annual counts of Musk Orchid (S.41/Red-listed) populations have revealed a severe decline. Reasons are unknown but could be a combination of climate-related and localised management influences at least at one of the sites. In October a new population of Basil Thyme (S.41/Red-listed) was found in a modern housing development built over former chalk downland south of Epsom.
- Bill Stanworth** (SBS) mentioned some locally threatened SNCIs at Normandy (inc. Anchor Copse).
- Bill Downey** (BC Surrey Branch).
- Is now Vice-Chair of the Surrey Branch, UKBMS transect coordinator for VC17 (=c.120 counted transects), and is also local species Champion for the S.41 White-letter Hairstreak.
 - BC has launched its new National Strategy, see here; <https://butterfly-conservation.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/Butterfly-Conservation-Strategy%20Brochure.pdf>
 - At branch level, concern that UKBMS data-set is successfully aggregated to inform trends at national level but less so for use in providing conservation evidence locally.
 - HLF Wealden Wood White project is ending this year, with no clear plans for exit strategy/continuity.
 - Has also been involved in SCC/SWT future management plan for Norbury Park consultation.
- Bronwen Chinien** (SCC).
- Surrey's 2050 PlaceAmbition (see; <https://www.surreysays.co.uk/environment-and-infrastructure/placeambition/>) is presently under consultation from Surrey Future partnership (coordinates strategic planning countywide). Investing in Natural Capital & Nature Recovery is one of x4 core strategic priorities; Climate Change responses embedded throughout. See webpage for commenting.
- Craig Hatton** (Spelthorne BC).
- Is a strategic planner for Spelthorne, working on new Local Plan – is progressing well and hopes to have an early stage public consultation for later this year.
 - Is responsible for response to present Defra consultation on BNG mentioned above. MW to cross-feed comments from draft SNP response with CH.
- Dave Page** (Elmbridge BC)
- EBC new Local Plan is also progressing, DP will notify when next under consultation.
 - Debate around fitness of GCN District Licensing scheme in Elmbridge; shortcomings of base-line data and land availability in urban fringe.
 - UKBMS includes monitoring transects on several EBC sites. Disease-resistant English Elms planted at Hurst Meadows to support White-letter Hairstreak.
 - Lower Mole Flood Alleviation Scheme largely within Elmbridge; EA is still modelling in old R. Mole loop for this. Meanwhile NNIS Floating Pennywort progressive removal undertaken by EBC with Lower Mole CP & Canoe England.
 - Esher Common; 20ha of heathland habitat restoration from mature conifer is ongoing.
 - Marbled White notably expanding its range across Elmbridge.
- Georgina Terry** (Natural England)
- New Countryside Stewardship window opens 18/02.
 - GT has new role with NE as area-based consultant to FE to ensure sustainable woodland creation across Thames-Solent region. Will keep Chiddingfold Forest and Mole Gap-Reigate, but all other Surrey SSSI and land management advice now with Sophie Sykes or Jane Sevenoaks.
 - Assisting FE with review of Chiddingfold Forest SSSI management plan; should offer continuity action towards objectives of the closing BC Wood White project.
 - Westbrook Mill consultation with EA, over proposed sluice removal.
 - Reigate Heath SSSI; preparing options appraisal for achieving wetland restoration in Units 1 & 3, via various current hydrological investigations, managed overall by Susan Medcalf (present) but involving both EA's groundwater team and SCC Flood Risk team. Irony not lost that site was previously drying



out and being proposed for denotification, but is now re-wetting naturally and people worried about controlling that..

Question from **RB** with ref. to forestry proposals at Sidney Wood, where scale of thinning could impact eg. recently identified bat interest. Recommended to take this up with Helen Miller.

Helen Cocker (Countryside Partnerships)

- Lower Moles delivering GCN replacement habitat for Elmbridge, having signed up to NE's scheme. Experience has shown that it is difficult to find land available for pond creation.
- Provision of volunteering opportunities is slowly getting back to normal.
- Heathland CP has recently taken on direction of a new volunteer group active on Pirbright Common for GBC.
- Experimenting with invisible fencing/shock collars with grazing herd, both for cattle & goats. Have found goats to be very quick on the uptake.
- New grazing sites this season on Headley Warren private nature reserve and Brockham Quarry/ Limeworks.
- [Big Chalk](#) – appears to be coming to a county near you finally (this ppt. suggests has been around in concept for some time already).

Izzy Soane (SBC)

- Works closely with CH in planning at Spelthorne.
- Main borough-owned site occupying much of Izzy's time is Staines Moor SSSI/SPA, where recent management has significantly reduced scrub extent over this season.
- SSSI includes smaller annex known as Shortwood Common, where a primary interest feature is a large former stock pond supporting a one-time strong population of the S.41/Red-listed Brown Galingale. A project focussed on recovering this species has concluded that the present water levels remain too high in summer, eliminating the muddy draw-down zone required by the plant. This is compounded both by extensive *Crassula* and Parrot's-feather. Bank clearance will be necessary to promote seasonal evaporation, and a reintroduction may eventually become necessary.
- OPM is on the increase in Spelthorne – alternative strategies to its control? **MW** to provide link to Geoff Monck of GBC who is leading a crusade against control by whole-canopy fumigation. Also new FE guidance available.

Jack Thompson (RSPB)

- Here in place of Mike Coates (Farnham Woods NR warden) who is absent.
- RSPB's Priority Landscapes program, ie. focusing on established IBAs. Here it is the Thames Basin & Wealden Heaths. Have developed plan with x3 main workstreams; i) regulatory casework/managing recreational disturbance; ii) Habitat management (mainly in Hants presently); iii) People & wildlife, community involvement.

John Edwards (SCC)

- Welcome to Bronwen on SCC team – will primarily be responsible for taking forward Env't. Act driven work streams.
- John Edwards is retiring from SCC at the end of April. It is intended that the role of County Ecologist will continue, to replace John. Bronwen Chinien has joined the team as Natural Environment Officer - not as John's replacement but she will be the initial contact for the Local Nature Recovery Network and BNG, and to provide a link with the new person for other work areas. All wished him well, and there will be due tribute to follow at an appropriate occasion.
- District Level Licensing, to be presented at coming Biodiversity & Planning Conference. Are x4 separate schemes running in Surrey. SCC is with Naturespace, where a dedicated Surrey Newt Officer has been appointed.
- Recent dealings with SCC Flooding Resilience team, where parallel NFM-type opportunities for realising wetland creation are well understood and received positively. Relatedly, case of A31 mismanagement of drainage balancing ponds; BVCP to now take this on. JE also been reviewing state of many village ponds, where mgmt. might be tweaked to benefit both biodiversity and local FA needs.
- Expanded Howell Hill LNR through to Priest Hill via Northey Fields SNCI concept; is growing legs and has tacit support of NE. Watch this space!
- SCC in early discussions with NE re. offer as Responsible Authority for LNRS. NE to now make formal recommendation to SoS.



- NE Standing Advice (online) on planning regulation for protected spp. & Ancient Woodland all recently revised (on 14/01); see here <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/protected-species-how-to-review-planning-applications> and here; <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-ancient-trees-and-veteran-trees-advice-for-making-planning-decisions>.
- Annual Recorders' Meeting 2022 – either online 19/02 or later in year in person. Decision rests with SBIC.

Lisa Creaye-Griffin (SyNP Director)

- To expand on earlier minute re. a SENP trans-SouthEast regional Nature Recovery Network mapping project, being undertaken (as offered) by South Downs NP. Purely a desk study using/compiling existing national GIS datasets. To present an early 'starter for 10' that individual counties can begin from (objective to ensure principle of seamless join-up from the outset). Lisa to bring a small ppt. on this to next meeting.

Paul Davey (Environment Agency)

- Deals a lot with planning casework as statutory consultee. All sorts of infrastructure in process at present in Wey catchment, eg. Sanway-Byfleet FA scheme ongoing, affects SWT Manor Farm NR, where we hope for realisation of NFM opportunities there, driven minly by EA's corporate target seeking 20% BNG wherever possible.

Ross Baker (Surrey Bat Group)

- Dagley Lane cycle scheme at Shalford – understood from SWT ecologist that proposal to make this lighted (and even tarmacked) has been abandoned – see <https://www.surreysays.co.uk/iai/dagleylane/> for details.
- Approval to re-commence hibernacula monitoring, following halt through COVID risk to bats; conditional on using minimal personnel, face masks and LFTs. At Godstone Mines all numbers low, so cannot say if the disturbed Nomies mine has suffered in comparison. But there was a Bechstein's bat here – a first for the Godstone complex. At Westhumble largely typical numbers. At Betchworth there are new access problems, where former tree surgeon occupier now left and scaffolding co. has taken over complete area, and apparently gone 'rogue' regarding planning constraints/conditions. SBG to investigate further as access through work yard is critical. Any intel on this current situation welcome (ie. from MVDC, SCC PRoW, SWT, SH AONB?).

Simon Elson (Surrey County Council)

- In 2021 the Mineral's Industry celebrated 50 years of restoration awards: [MPA Quarries & Nature 2021 ... A 50 year success story - Complete Show - YouTube](#) (Surrey sites included!). For the brochure if you prefer: <https://www.mineralproducts.org/MPA/media/root/Publications/2021/Nature-brochure-Online-V2-Spreads.pdf>
- At Tice's Meadow in Farnham, SCC has now taken the freehold ownership (purchase supported by funding from Waverley, Guildford, Farnham Town Council, Rushmoor and Hants CC). The Bird Group on the site have a local wildlife film maker Josh Guyan is following them for a year in order to make a documentary. Here is the link to the first edited footage: <https://youtube/LfL83Gz-t94>.
- At Molesey Reservoir 'Plan B' is being pursued whereby Thames Water, having failed to offload future management responsibility to a 3rd party eNGO, now intends to stay as primary site manager but as advised by a consultative board of reps. from all interested biodiversity groups, to assist in various management projects as permitted. In early autumn 2021, a juvenile Otter found on Thames tow-path at Molsesey - had been attacked by a dog and taken to Wildlife Aid, where it died. Origins therefore a mystery; given its age could be from a reasonably local breeding population/pr.

Stewart Cocker (Epsom & Ewell BC)

- E&EBC new Head of Place (aka planning) is Vicki Potts.
- Countryside Mgmt team put back within planning directorate, on basis of assisting new BNG responsibilities.
- Thames Water has confirmed major (£150k) funding contribution for river restoration in Hogsmill LNR, led by SERT and also with SCC Flood Risk backing in recognition of NFM benefits.
- Sarah Clift (present) has completed new habitat mgmt plans for both Epsom Downs and Nonsuch Park, with Epsom Golf Course in process. Wanted to thank Ann Sankey for botanical records input.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operational Services team determined to source appropriate cutting/clearing equipment to optimise mowing regimes across borough. Volunteering hours slowly recovering – 1/3 down on 2019, but 1/2 in 2020, so improving. <p>Vivienne Riddle (Tandridge DC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The emerging Local Plan is still under examination and discussions and decisions regarding our LP are ongoing, as necessary. <p><i>in absentia:</i></p> <p>Jane Smith (MVDC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MV Local Plan. Expectation is for the Examination in Public (EiP) to take place in the spring/summer, with the timetable to be confirmed once an Inspector is appointed. Note that Local Plan includes a BNG requirement of 20%, based on SyNP's recommendations. Has been challenged by a number of developers, both on principle (ought to stay with the 10% minimum of Env't. Act) & in terms of whether it is achievable on smaller sites. Received representations of both SWT & SyNP and good to have both organisations' express support for 20%, backed up by the November 2020 position statement. Depending what further information is sought by the Local Plan Inspector, we may need to come to the LNP for further support at Examination. <p>John Devonshire (Runnymede BC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopted our Green & Blue Infrastructure SPD, came into force in December 2021. Have also started 1st review of current Local Plan and are at early evidence gathering stage with Issues & Options consultation planned in autumn this year. <p>Lara Beattie (Woking BC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planet Woking newsletter – next edition coming soon. Subscribe at www.planetwoking.co.uk. Planet Woking is Woking Borough Council's climate and ecological communications programme. Past newsletters are available online at https://planetwoking.co.uk/get-involved/newsletters/. Corporate Strategy 2022-27. Public consultation carried out during autumn 2021 showed that the environment and climate change are considered core priorities and will be at the heart of the emerging Strategy. Woking BC and Surrey Wildlife Trust are discussing a joint biodiversity project event for the late spring. More information will be brought back to the group when available. Local environmental group Woking Environment Action (WEAct) will be launching a new hedgehog conservation project in the spring to coincide with Hedgehog Awareness Week (2-8 May). Residents will be encouraged to get involved by reporting sightings and making hedgehog friendly adaptations to their gardens. More information coming soon to their website at https://wokingenvironmentaction.com/. <p>David Watts (R&BBC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New 10yr Woodland Management Plan for Banstead Woods has been approved by FC and is in operation. Objectives include rotational coppice, high forest continuous cover, management of veteran trees and creation of seasonal ponds. Renewed 5yr management plan for Earlswood Common LNR is in its first draft stage and undergoing consultation with the steering group. Ash Dieback and OPM are both spreading from the north of the borough and is now becoming established in the Reigate/Redhill area, monitoring and control of both are underway. 	
6.	<p>AOB: SM & JE attended Rob McGibbon's memorial event in Dorset. Suggestions open for some fitting memorial to him in Surrey, be it a named site or actual installation somewhere.</p> <p>JE recommended viewing various links in chat: Planning Advisory Service page on BNG; https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/topics/environment/biodiversity-net-gain#pas-events NDP email is to join The Nature Recovery Network Delivery Partnership; NDPNatureRecovery@naturalengland.org.uk British Standard on BNG; https://cieem.net/british-standard-for-biodiversity-net-gain-published/.</p>	All
	DoNM 2022	



	11th May 14.00; 7th Sept 14.00. All venues to be confirmed (offers welcome).	
	Acronyms BNG – Biodiversity Net Gain; EEBC - Epsom & Ewell; EBC - Elmbridge; FE - Forest England; GBC - Guildford; GCN – Great Crested Newt; MVDC - Mole Valley; RBBC- Reigate & Banstead; RuBC - Runnymede; SBC - Spelthorne; WoBC - Woking; SCC - Surrey County; NFM - Natural Flood Management; NNIS – Non-Native Invasive Species; 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; SPA – Special Protection Area; TW Thames Water.	