




## Biodiversity Working Group

Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> January 2024 1:30-4:00pm @Surrey County Council, Woodhatch Place, 11  
Cockshot Hill, Woodhatch, Reigate, RH2 8EF


### Minutes:

1.	<p>Present: <b>Mike Waite (Chair), Zoe Williams SyNP, Adam Brown (SCC), Hendryk Jurk (GBC), Bronwen Chinien (SHBC), Stewart Cocker (EEBC), Helen Cocker (SCC), Molly Easton (NE), Ross &amp; Lynn (SBG), Ann Sankey (SBS), Viv Greenough (SCC), Dave Page (EBC), Lisa Creaye-Griffin (SNP), Bill Downey (BS), Mark Crisp &amp; Jack Thompson (RSPB), Victoria Hawkins (HC), Rachel Coburn (SCC), David Olliver (WaBC), Louise Nolan (MVBC), Dave Page (EA), Andi Roy (RBC)</b>  <b>New member introductions; Anna Fjortoft (SBC), Lydia Dowell (MVDC)</b></p>	
	<p><b>Apologies:</b> Ann Bailey (SCC), Lara Beattie (WoBC), Helen Miller (FE), Chloe Rose (RSPB), Christa Emmett (SHS), Zoe Channon (SWT), Tracey Haskins (WoBC), Mark Dawson (NT), Andrew Jamieson (SWT), Alistair Kirk (SBIC), Bridget Fox (WT).</p>	
2.	<p>The minutes of the meeting of 20/09/2023 were agreed.</p>	
3.	<p><b>Matters Arising:</b></p> <p><b>Review of the SNCI selection criteria;</b>  Criteria are still in draft, VG met with AK on 08.01.2024; updated species list to be sent to VG by the end of the week, end of January this will be sent to BioWG, with a month for feedback. Working group to meet end of March 2024. We then plan to have more meetings this year due to the backlog in candidate SNCI. MK, we probably need to review who sits on this group; AK is doing this.</p> <p><b>Irreplaceable habitats – national policy guidance:</b> ME; Natural England is very disappointed in the current list as issued, and encourages everyone to submit comments when the promised consultation on this matter is held later this year (indicated as autumn?).</p> <p><b>Conference update:</b> LC-G; 12.03.2024 in Dorking Halls, our speaker line-up is almost complete; we will be focusing on BNG and the LNRS; there will be a display from this Biodiversity WG. ZW; Tickets are on sale now, <a href="#">Click here</a>. The BioWG stand will require volunteers as well as ideas for the content/display.</p> <p><b>M25 J10 Improvement Scheme:</b> VG and Sy Bat Group action complete M25 junction 10. Further action.</p> <p><b>BNG:</b> Legislation to take effect for Major applications in early February. <a href="#">BNG launch date confirmed - Land use: policies and framework (blog.gov.uk)</a>.</p> <p><b>Actions carried forward:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AK speak to Brian Spooner &amp; Dick Alder to share inventory information on Ancient Trees.</li> <li>• ME to make introduction with Jess Aldred of NE, as Thames Solent team Species Project Officer.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Actions:</b></p> <p><b>Action:</b>  <b>VG</b> to attempt to monitor Domenico roost</p>
4.	<p><b>BNG: Planning Validation checklist update (Bronwen Chinien SHBC)</b>  Please click here for the document shared prior to the meeting.</p> <div style="text-align: center;">   DRAFT Biodiversity Net Gain application requirements v2.pdf </div> <p>Although this is now a national requirement, individual LPA's need to update their own <b>validation lists</b>. BC then broke down the main points within the document. SHBC's list is designed to be aligned with the secondary legislation on BNG issued in November, and particularly the draft BNG planning practice guidance. SHBC are presently pursuing a minimum 20% BNG requirement policy, but is yet to be adopted. There is a link to the exemption lists <a href="#">The Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024 (legislation.gov.uk)</a>.</p> <p><b>Q&amp;A:</b></p>	



	<p><b>VG</b> Raised that a LPA cannot refuse for reasons around BNG, despite it being a legal requirement.</p> <p><b>BC</b> has inferred from consultation that there are contrasting positions between CIEEM and other organisations. When BNG policy concerns all case-officers (i.e.. to all who wouldn't formerly have to consider ecology matters), it will inevitably slow determination.</p> <p><b>PD</b> Had a query on BNG exemption, which poses a problem for EA, e.g. currently the EA obliged to do BNG on a simple fish pass [but has 20% net gain corporate policy anyway]. Guildford BC has exemplary BNG policy, in that it specifies requirements for protected sites as well.</p> <p><b>MW</b> Remains policy guidance for LPAs able to offer locally-appropriate fine-tuning guidance (inc. minimum %, if justified). Regarding 'additionality' proviso, it appears the prescribed list of what could count towards required BNG % is growing in favour of 'easier' compliance.</p> <p><b>SC</b> queried SHBC checklist in BNG to be secured via TCPA Section 106 agreement, ie. no mention of Conservation Covenants. <b>BC</b> - yes that section verbatim from the recommended guidance. <b>VG</b> - no LPA can yet be a responsible authority for conservation covenants as the system of registration is still under development. SCC is updating their validation checklist; will clearly require indicative BNG plans admissible at validation (in PPG there is room for flexibility; "...LPA's can ask for more if they so wish."</p> <p><b>Strategic significance (metric) multiplier was also discussed, as national guidance now questions validity of SyNP's previously issued policy guidance on this, eg. no multiplier should be applied in baseline evaluation.</b> <b>ME</b> NE guidance is justified in that strategic importance is regarded as a future outcome and as such is non-sensical to apply at baseline. <b>MW</b> this, however, disregards any pre-planning LNP's might have to weight potential landscape-scale 'strategic importance', as we have done with our formulation of the Surrey BOAs.</p>	
<p>5.</p>	<p>Completion of the duty to "<b>Consider what can be done to conserve and enhance biodiversity</b>" (required under the NERC Act 2006 [amended], by 31/12/2023) - round-robin/All public.</p> <p><b>MW</b> invited the boroughs and districts to give insight on where they are at.</p> <p><b>Q&amp;A:</b></p> <p><b>AR (Runnymede BC)</b> have considered internally amongst officers but not yet taken this to elected members. When to be legally adopted, we will take this wider. We have considered our necessary actions to create a Biodiversity Report, including things that will need to be funded, inc. partnership working, more Local Nature Reserves, climate change adaptation, Green &amp; Blue infrastructure. Must set out actions and policies asap &gt;01/01/2024.</p> <p><b>BC (Surrey Heath BC)</b> don't have a separate biodiversity action plan published. We are expanding the scope of the climate action plan to include a 'biodiversity action plan'. To inc. better control of contracted estate work, planning policy, influencing landowners, education, communications, monitoring and reporting. This is a work-in-progress.</p> <p><b>LN (Mole Valley BC)</b> Too early to say, is new to this role.</p> <p><b>SC (Epsom &amp; Ewell BC)</b> We do have a biodiversity action plan, and we are members of this group, there is action across various groups, so there is plenty we can 'tick-off'. Most interesting outcome is to take the duty to other departments to see their role in compliance (for example the finance team). We also have a climate change action plan, where it will be important to align policies.</p> <p><b>DP (Elmbridge BC)</b> Not aware of anything in response at present. Will get back to you on this.</p> <p><b>HJ (Guildford BC)</b> We have yet to react to this, but do have an adopted BNG policy, and our Countryside Strategy. Our main issue will be the resource to regularly research and report on this.</p> <p><b>AF (Spelthorne BC)</b> We have an old BAP, not revised since 2009, but I hope this could be revised soon. [<b>MW</b> raised that even parish level authorities were subject to the Biodiversity Duty].</p> <p><b>VG.</b> We are presenting on the duty and the LNRS to Parish Councils in February, I will encourage parish councils to share what they are doing with each other. Would it be possible for all LPA's to unite on a Biodiversity Action Plan, and still be compliant. Surely this is the Surrey LNRS..?</p> <p><b>LC-G.</b> Suggested that she could write to the Boroughs/Districts from the SyNP, reminding them of the compliance date under the revised Bio Duty.</p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p><b>Surrey Local Nature Recovery Strategy</b> Adam Brown, LNRS Manager SCC</p> <p>New in post; here at SCC for a month now. Previously worked at WWF, then South Downs NP as a Landscape Specialist. I have been helping the Norfolk LNRS as a country advisor, now moving on to do this myself in Surrey. In concept the elements of an LNRS sound very simple, but it is more complicated. The initial 'local habit map' is in draft, compiled by our GIS team at SCC. Only remaining section to be finalised is the extent of the irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland and trees, but what else?</p> <p><b>MW</b> has drafted the habitats and species description for Surrey, which will be subject to a prioritisation process to ascertain the principal deliverables for nature recovery. We must then look at the specific</p>	



	<p>opportunities, in terms of current land usage, which we can then take out for engagement. On engagement I have had budgetary sign-off for the engagement facilities; LC-G has produced a draft recommended strategy and we are largely using all of its suggestions. We also have sign-off on a logo and branding for the LNRS – ‘Surrey Nature Recovery’. There will be a website for this to all be in one place.</p> <p>I will sit on the Supporting Authorities Group (Bs&amp;Ds, NE, etc), the Engagement Working Group, the Technical Data and Mapping Group, Species Recovery Technical Group. I will be working on the terms of reference for these groups, to have this ready to determine the groups and invited members to know what they are signing up for.</p> <p><b>Q&amp;A:</b>  <b>MW</b> sent round the executive summary for the draft description (sent with agenda email). <b>RB</b> What is the timescale for setting up the species working groups? <b>AB</b>, I will be hoping to have some dates out and start recruiting in the next month. Just waiting for cabinet meeting dates to make sure everything is aligned. We are looking to collate those actions that are happening and actions that are planned, in terms of nature recovery, from all partners, etc. Most of this will be a data management issue, I have a background in data and GIS, so this shouldn't be an issue.</p>	
7.	<p><b>River Thames Flood Alleviation Scheme</b> – update from SCC/Chair Zoe Chick, Tabatha Boniface.</p> <p>Please click here to view the sides.</p> <div style="text-align: center;">   <a href="#">RTS PEIR Briefing Presentation - Surrey Biodiversity Meeting 17Jan24.pdf</a> </div> <p>Statutory consultation starts next week, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024 for six weeks details on our webpage. There will be a draft landscape design map.</p> <p><b>Q&amp;A:</b>  <b>AS</b> How fixed is the route? Because last year new interest was identified for a meadow adjacent but superior even to Thorpe Hay Meadow (SSSI), which is directly impacted by the scheme. <b>TB</b> now fairly fixed, but there is still a possibility for review. <b>TB</b> we are aware of it, and have fed this into the team, who are doing some more surveys. <b>MW</b> although very early days, solution might be to use material from impacted meadow, for use as a bespoke seed-mix in habitat creation across the scheme.</p> <p><b>DP</b> One major problem identified from an earlier consultation workshop was that the main channel uses several existing water bodies, and will therefore impact these, at least in terms of changed water levels. Have you had any thoughts on that? <b>TB</b> there are assessments ongoing in context of Water Framework Directive, and this is a known issue and could be a significant impact of the scheme.</p> <p><b>PD</b> aware that there are issues around distributing elevated nitrified water into SW London waterbodies SPA lakes.</p> <p><b>DP</b> Do you now have confidence with regards to its funding, as this has been the consistent reason for delay to the scheme? <b>TB</b> It now has committed funding as a multi-agency funded programme, but we are still looking for further funding.</p>	
8.	<p><b>Partner Updates:</b></p> <p><b>Rachel Coburn (SCC)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oxted Chalkpit - application for housing development and restoration of the wider site was made to SCC in September 2023, includes landscaping and public access areas, and footpath improvements to chalkpit lane. Currently approved scheme is to chalk grassland and woodland. This followed both the applicant and SCC taking legal advice on who the determining authority should be. Tandridge have since challenged jurisdiction over the application in the courts following legal advice of their own. A hearing is scheduled for 29 February 2024. SCC is continuing to work on the application pending the outcome of the legal challenge.</li> <li>Restoration progressing on other sites. Runfold South should hopefully be completed this year – been delayed due to amendments needed to surface water drainage scheme. Suez have arranged for Surrey Hedge Laying Group to lay part of the hedge along the southern boundary, by the North Downs Way – work starts in February.</li> </ul> <p><b>Victoria Hawkins (HC)</b></p>	



- Pursuing a 'super' NNR partnership for Heathland Connections landscape. This is focusing on the Wealden Heaths area, South West Surrey, and potentially looking to expand across borders into Hampshire & West Sussex.
- Exploring options for a Round 3 Landscape Recovery bid to help deliver our ambition for enhancing, creating and connecting heathlands.
- Heathland Connections and SWT are finalising an MoA to deliver two projects in the Heathland Connections landscape. The first is a landowner engagement project and the second is baseline data project.

#### **Helen Cocker (SCP)**

- The Surrey Countryside Partnerships have been approved as a Big Chalk Project. In October we celebrated the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lower Mole Partnership, the oldest of the Countryside Partnerships in Surrey.
- During summer 2023 the Lower Mole Countryside Trust (an independent charity that supports countryside work in the Lower Mole area) funded a botanical survey of Young Street Verge which the Lower Mole Partnership has been managing for many years, the results indicate that it is good enough quality to be considered as an SNCI.
- The Surrey Heathland Partnership volunteer task programme is going well with over 450 volunteer hours since the programme started with one day a week in October, since Christmas the tasks have increased to two days per week.
- We have continued to get a lot of corporate interest in volunteer days, including the Downlands Partnership hosting two days with Toyota on Banstead Heath with the Banstead Commons Conservators and one day with Toyota at the Grazing team's farm.
- After 18 months with no problems the Grazing team suffered 3 dog attacks on their sheep in one weekend in November, 1 at Brockham Limeworks and 2 at Happy Valley in Croydon. The police are taking action against a dog owner responsible for one of the attacks at Happy Valley.

#### **Bill Downey (BC)**

- **Butterfly Conservation (BC) has two new members of staff.**  
Steven Lofting is the new Regional Conservation Manager for SE England. He is based in Kent and so does not know Surrey well. I will invite him to a future meeting to introduce himself and give a presentation.
- Richard Austin is the new Landscape Manager for Surrey and Sussex. He will be managing the reserves.
- **BC** has a number of strands to its new strategy, inc. threatened species (species which are nationally threatened). In Surrey this includes the Straw Belle moth and the Wood White butterfly.
- Landscape Strategy – a listing of priority landscapes in the UK for butterflies and moths. In Surrey these are the North Downs, the Thames Basin Heaths and the West Weald.
- BC is on the cusp of signing a national agreement with Forestry England (FE) to agree a framework for monitoring/transsect walking on and for conservation work to take place on FE land. In the past these permissions have been determined by local FE teams and the new agreement will hopefully provide more consistency for both organisations as we work together in the future.
- January to March is the time I scope out new transects and this year there will be an emphasis on heathland sites – with new routes going in at Puttenham Common, Horsell Common and Ceasar's Camp at Upper Hale. There will also be new routes at Kew Gardens, Winkworth Arboretum, Eashing Meadows.

#### **Elmbridge BNG Update**

EBC have identified 5 sites which are being assessed by SCC Ecologists as funds allow over the next few years, starting spring 2024. Sites inc. Hersham Riverside 8.5ha, Molesey Heath SNCI 21ha, Littleworth Common Esher SNCI 48.8ha, Old Common Cobham SNCI 13.9ha, and Stoke Field SNCI Long Ditton 6.3ha. Esher Common Adder reintroduction commenced during 2023 with 15 adults in total. Survival has been excellent in the first year. Also a new born was observed in September. 3 further refugia/hibernacula have been created during December to aid the expansion of the population across the site. With grateful thanks to Paul McNamee, SARG member for his voluntary monitoring work on this project.



Dave Page is initiating some detailed research into identifying which species of ant are present and hosting the *Plebejus argus* Silver studded Blue on Fairmile Common. This isolated butterfly colony is not thriving despite targeted habitat work and it seems that ant density is lower than previously and may be a major factor in decline. Mike Downey comments that this is also a concern on the chalk where species associated with ants are also not thriving. Of course, lack of ants are not the only threats with climate, predation, parasitism, habitat suitability and in-breeding all potential threats. Dave needs to find answers before this colony starts to decline beyond the point of no return.

#### **Andrew Jamieson (SWT) Space4Nature**

- We have been working with the University of Surrey team on their predictive modelling of chalk grassland and heathland habitat in Surrey based on AI machine learning and data gathering in Summer 2023. Validation of the remotely predicted sites will form part of the field work this year together with additional Citizen Science surveys on other test sites.
- We held our Citizen Science Open Forum event before Christmas - a full recording of this event can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXBkoloH3J0>
- Louis Harrington-Edmans' work implementing B-lines is on course to exceed the habitat target of 30 hectares through a mix of directly delivered work and management advice to landowners.
- Ben Siggery's research evaluating the how far paleoecology currently influences conservation practice can be seen here: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fevo.2023.1304510/full>. Also, a paper published in CIEEM's "In Practice" journal. Thank you to all those who took part in interviews as part of this research.

#### **Stewart Cocker (EEBC)**

- The Hogsmill Catchment Partnership wetland creation project in the Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve managed by the South East Rivers Trust is nearing completion having been significantly delayed due to poor weather/ground conditions.
- In October 2023 the EEBC Environment Committee endorsed EEBC involvement in the proposed Thames To Downs National Nature Reserve naming five sites for inclusion, Epsom Common LNR, Horton Country Park LNR, Hogsmill LNR, Manor Open Space and Nonsuch Park.

#### **Ann Sankey (SBS)**

We are continuing to work with SWT on the Irreplaceable Grasslands Inventory and are planning the areas to be recorded this coming year.

#### **In absentia updates:**

##### **Tracey Haskins (WoBC)**

- Ongoing preparations for mandatory BNG - a local planning advice note on BNG is to be made available this month;
- Prepared a summary of delivery of our [Natural Working](#) biodiversity and green infrastructure strategy, to be published shortly;
- Reviewed the actions we will take in the future to conserve and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of the Council's functions, in accordance with the strengthened biodiversity duty (agenda item 5 refers).

##### **Christa Emmett (SHS)**

- We are pleased to report that last Thursday (11th Jan) 12 of our volunteers found a brilliant 33 Harvest Mouse Nests at Unstead Wetland Nature Reserve near Bramley. This was done in partnership with Dan Banks from Surrey Wildlife Trust. Harvest Mouse Nests are important indicators of Harvest Mouse presence and this data will contribute to the National Harvest Mouse Survey, run by The Mammal Society. The small mammal is also one of our 30 Surrey Hills Indicator Species. We have now trained 20 people with both an online and practical training session to have the confidence to go out and search for harvest mouse nests themselves and continue contributing to Surrey records. Mike Waite has suggested areas to look where records are low, and these suggestions have been passed onto the volunteers.

##### **Bridget Fox (WT)**

- In partnership with American Forests and the Centre for Sustainable Health Care (NHS Forest) the Woodland Trust has published the UK Tree Equity Score map and tool. This combines urban canopy cover with social indicators to come up with a Tree Equity Score for each urban



	<p>locality. <a href="https://uk.treeequityscore.org/">https://uk.treeequityscore.org/</a> We hope this will be a powerful tool for councils and other landowners wanting to prioritise urban tree planting appropriately and could complement Surreys Urban BOA work as well as supporting local authority GI strategies and BNG plans.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other Woodland Trust news:</li> <li>• we've commented on the Government's ELMS announcement (4 Jan) welcoming greater support for nature on farms, but calling for greater security of funding and regulation <a href="https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/press-centre/2024/01/statement-on-gov-elm-announcement/">https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/press-centre/2024/01/statement-on-gov-elm-announcement/</a></li> <li>• we are hosting a volunteer tree planting day at our Langley Vale wood on 23 March, contact me for further information.</li> </ul>	
6.	<p><b>AOB:</b> -</p>	
	<p><b>DoNM;</b></p> <p>15<sup>th</sup> May 2024 1:30- 4pm, Location: TBC (Woodhatch requested)</p> <p>Back by popular demand! 10<sup>th</sup> July 2024 BioWG Field Day. Location: TBC</p> <p>Sept 11<sup>th</sup> 1:30- 4pm, Location: TBC (Woodhatch requested)</p>	
	<p><b>Abbreviata</b></p> <p>BNG – Biodiversity Net Gain; EEBC ; Epsom &amp; Ewell; EBC ; Elmbridge; FE ; Forest England; GBC ; Guildford; GCN – Great Crested Newt; MVDC ; Mole Valley; RBBC; Reigate &amp; 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.</p>	

