



Biodiversity Working Group

Wednesday 15th May 2024 1:30-4:30pm @Surrey County Council, Woodhatch Place, 11
Cockshot Hill, Woodhatch, Reigate, RH2 8EF

Minutes:

1.	<p>Present: Mike Waite (SWT), Adam Brown (SCC), Victoria Hawkins (NE), Tom Childs (GBC), Ross Baker & Lynn Whitfield (SBG), Dave Page (EBC), Lydia Dowell (MVDC), Rachel Coburn (SCC), Zoe Williams (SyNP), Simon Elson (Ind.), Anne Bailey (SCC), Anna Fjortoft (SpBC)</p> <p>Online: Alistair Kirk (SBIC), Andi Roy (RuBC), David Williams (SBG), Lucy Shea (BanC), Mark Crisp (RSPB), Stewart Cocker (EEBC), Viv Greenough (SCC) Ann Sankey (SBS)</p>	
	<p>Apologies: Jack Thompson (RSPB), Cameron Dent (R&BBC), Georgina Terry (NE), Sarah Clift (E&EBC), Aran Henderson (WoBC), Mark Dawson (NT), Susan Medcalf (SBS), Sean Grufferty (SCC), Crispin Scott (NT), Bill Downey (BC)</p>	
2.	<p>The minutes of the meeting of 17/01/2024 were agreed.</p>	
3.	<p>Matters Arising:</p> <p>Review of the SNCI selection criteria; VG: The Sy Local Sites Partnership met last week, first meeting since 2017, meeting on the updated SNCI criteria, now is in final draft format, we discussed comments on that criteria and Claire Gibbs at SWT is now finalising the document. Hopefully this will be finalised before our next SLSP meeting on 12th June. Re. candidate SNCI's we have a list Alistair and I will circulate, and prioritise which to discuss at the next meeting. Hoping to get through 4-5 cSNCI at the next meeting. AK: When we get the criteria formally signed off, there will inevitably be existing sites requiring boundary review, inc. extensions and/or deletions.</p> <p>M25 J10 Improvement Scheme: VG and Surrey Bat Group – liaison re. San Domenico bat roost. VG has spoken to the Highways England's consultant, they responded. RB - response was inconclusive, however. VG - we are keeping a watching eye on it.</p> <p>Carried forward from previous meetings: (AK has taken this forward.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AK has made progress with accessibility/consolidation of ongoing Ancient Trees Inventory with existing datasets. ABr has since been using this list to inform his LNRS mapping work. Woodland Trust has agreed use of their national dataset by LNRS RA's via Natural England. Concern was for use by eg. commercial consultancies vs. not-for-profit bodies. ME has linked MW to her colleague Jess Aldred of NE, re. species prioritisation aspect of LNRS. <p>MW asked RC for any further update on the housing application at Oxted Chalkpit? RC - Tandridge DC has withdrawn their determination challenge with SCC; and SCC is still within their consultation stage. RB - raised that there will be bat interest on the site. VG - I have reviewed the application for ecology; there are indeed lime kilns, and has recommended more surveys required. RB and LB will liaise further with VG on this case.</p> <p>MW - for those who do not yet know, both Tracey Haskins and Lara Beattie, former reps. from Woking BC are no longer in post. So presently we have no representation from Woking.</p>	<p>Actions:</p>



<p>4.</p>	<p>BNG: Strategic Significance discussion - Adam Brown and Ann Bailey.</p> <p>Aba: Recent considerations as to how we best apply the Metric’s ‘strategic significance’ in Surrey, both for the time being (until the LNRS sets this out), and in the LNRS when guidance for this is more prescriptive. There is a ‘user guide’ in the statutory guidance, with a table that outlines how this should be applied, but allowance for local variation and nuance is the debateable issue.</p> <p>[As background, at an earlier stage local autonomy (‘policy’) on the issue was then assumed, leading to the proposed application regime annexed to the SyNP’s BNG planning support document issued ahead of BNG introduction in October 2023. National guidance on this matter has subsequently changed, but still with some equivocation ahead of adopted LNRS.]</p> <p>At SCC we are fairly clear that application of ‘high significance’ should be reserved for within/adjacent to the established BOAs. Discussion then revolves around when/where to use ‘medium’ and ‘low’ significance.</p> <p>MW: To be clear, this discussion does not concern any application at ‘baseline’ evaluation, as guidance now tells us that (theoretically) no-where has any significance pre-LNRS planning? [Which incidentally makes mockery of a decade’s worth of local ecological network planning achieved throughout the south-east and in many other parts of the country.]</p> <p>ABr: My understanding that this <u>was</u> to be allowed at baseline, but not once the LNRS is in place.</p> <p>ABa: We are working in particular with Elmbridge BC and a national habitat bank, to have a site secured, where the developer has argued around application of strategic significance, as the site is alongside the R. Mole.</p> <p>MW: To reiterate, the SyNP annex tried to use the multiplier at baseline, as a <u>dis</u>incentive to development in BOAs (as requiring more in total net gain), but as an <u>in</u>centive to locating off-site net gain within BOAs, as the grand design always aimed to achieve. Added that it would be highly unpopular to establish a temporary practice ahead of the LNRS, only to have it change drastically after.</p> <p>AB: Have districts and boroughs announce what document we should be using in the interim.? ABa: No one has yet released anything; all we (SCC) have is an emergent validation check list.</p> <p>ABa: At the most recent CIEEM BNG training on this, we were told to focus on the ‘must..’ (non-negotiable) guidance in the document. By implication, everything else can be left to ‘local policy’ setting in relevant local authorities. Offered to draft something to share to BioWG, including a simple small document recommending strategic significance.</p> <p>LD: Interestingly, there has been a significant reduction in planning applications in MV [since BNG became operational] with only five ‘Major applications’ and many claiming exemption. Also, MVDC suspects more than one case of purposeful pre-app site degradation - hard to validate/enforce. AB: Can certainly check things like pre-extant trees, as there are map(s)/aerials to prove presence before planning.</p> <p>RB: Is the Wildlife Trust’s EPAS involved in this? MW- Indeed, EPAS manager Rob Hutchinson is very much involved and available to advise. SE: Don’t the district/boroughs use EPAS as their key advisor, including on validation? MW - EPAS has never advised strictly on validation. SE: worried that at least initially, planning officers may be only too happy to recognise developer claims of exemption, to remove consideration of BNG as so complicated.</p> <p>LD: On a further matter, TCPA Section 106 has been challenged as a legal mechanism for securing BNG. SE - should we write to Nick White (Lead Advisor on BNG at Natural England)? ABa - that could be helpful, but more likely to just be directed to the online user guidance. VG: They will probably say that it is up to individual LPAs to decide, so we should see this positively, as advantageous and all more witness implying that such are local policy matters. “Ann & I will work on producing county guidance. It is our chance to best direct efforts to work for nature recovery in Surrey.”</p>	<p>Action: ABa to daft a sample document for comment on/inc. application of ‘strategic significance’.</p>
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<p>5.</p>	<p>Surrey Nature Recovery update - Adam Brown (SCC) and Lisa Creaye-Griffin (SyNP) and Mike Waite (SWT).</p> <p>AB: We have been focusing on engagement, working with the SCC team. The dedicated portal is now online (Common place): Have Your Say Today - Local Nature Recovery Strategy - Commonplace. Here, there is a 10-question survey and an interactive map. We hosted two hour-long 'launch webinars' last week, at lunchtime and in the evening. About x150 people attended, feedback has been positive. Mike, Lisa and I all spoke on that. Also available on the Surrey Nature Partnership YouTube Channel. Surrey Nature Recovery Webinar (youtube.com)</p> <p>The next section is the themed conversations from the 23/05 ending on 11/07. Are x7 planned in total; for non-farming land owners, farmers, youth, generic 'people', communities, nature and people. Each has a limited attendee list of 30 per session. We have an invite list. If you want to be part of this, please email us.</p> <p>I am currently working on the data mapping. Also, completing the review of all existing policy/plans. There are around x90 extant relevant documents. I plan to publish this to the group to check for any gaps.</p> <p>MW: I have been appointed to complete the species review & prioritisation element; some of you I have contacted already for evidence gathering, initially for input/endorsement of the draft species 'Long-list'. Currently on consultation for corrections and recommendations for the '3rd criterion', ie. additional 'worthy' locally significant species beyond, those IUCN threatened or near threatened. We will then look to prioritise for a species 'Short-list'. Watch this space.</p> <p>AB: As part of the broader engagement programme, we are asking to attend meetings/events that are already going ahead, if you have any event or forums please let us know we will try to attend. I am looking to creating a crib sheet to train people up to attend these events. I have been supported very well to date by Lisa C-G and ZW, but there is a lot to cover.</p> <p>LW: Note there is new LNRS guidance for bats from the BCT - I will send to MW.</p> <p>ZW: I will circulate the videos for the webinar.</p>	<p>Action: ZW to send out webinars. (Sent 19.06.2024.)</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Partner updates</p> <p>MW: Sarah Jane CEO of Surrey Wildlife Trust is unable to be here today but the update from her is that she has taken over as Chair of the South East Nature Partnership. Looking forward this will be known as 'Nature South-East'. LC-G: She has plans for the future of Nature South-East to help draw funding both for NSE and the county partnerships within it.</p> <p>Mark Crisp RSPB Farnham Heath: Took over from Mike Coates at RSPB Farnham Heath in 02/23. This year has seen increased numbers including Redstart, Woodlark, and Tree pipit. Nightjars are expected to be up as well. Field cricket have started singing and there's been plenty of reptile activity, especially Sand lizards. I've also had a Lesser spotted woodpecker drumming on site (personal highlight). If anyone has any questions or ever wants to contact me please feel free to email mark.crisp@rspb.org.uk.</p> <p>Lucy Shea (Banstead Common Conservators): We had an exciting discovery of two adult GCN on Burgh Heath last week under litter (cardboard). We were concerned we'd lost them from site, and it is a timely rediscovery. BCC is working with the Newt Conservation Partnership to create and restore pond networks on Burgh Heath and Banstead Heath. NCP have also found GCN eggs on Banstead Heath.</p> <p>Also working on a £40K grant for 3 pond restoration projects, to buy volunteer tools and resources to support pond conservation work and an interpretation board on Banstead Heath. Fantastic results with reptile surveys on Banstead Heath this year - 6 adders found on one day, 4 adults and 2 juveniles. As well as Common lizards, grass snakes and slow worms.</p> <p>Meeting SBG to put up bat detectors on Banstead Heath tomorrow - 16/5.</p> <p>Conservation grazing on our chalk grassland sites has been expanded this year and we're working with DPGT and SBS to carry out regular surveys of the sites.</p> <p>We are hoping our SMPs will go to public consultation in June. Publicised on our noticeboards, social media pages and website.</p>	<p>SJC to be invited to the September meeting. (Sj is unable to attend LCG to provide update.)</p>



Excited to be hosting Nature Detective Days aimed at families on Banstead Common; all fully booked with limited promotion - <https://bansteadcommons.org.uk/visiting/wildlife-detective-days/>
Opportunity to recognise and say thanks to all the wonderful volunteers who give their time and knowledge to support us!

Rachel Coburn SCC: See Matters Arising re. Oxted. Hanson's plc have put forward SCC site at Tice's meadow forward for a mineral planning authority award. At Betchworth restored quarry, we have grazed the site with the grazing team.

Lydia Dowell MVDC: Re. BNG, first eligible planning applications are in. We are drafting our local validation list; we now have a BNG page on our website with a FAQ page for developers. We are drafting model Section 106 agreements; we are going to outsource legal firms to critique this draft. The Local Plan is anticipated for full adoption end of this year (inc. minimum 20% BNG policy). **VG** - I was recently at a Surrey Place Leader's Group meeting presenting on place-making and BNG, where it was clear all LPAs would be interested in a model template S.106 for BNG, for consistency. Will pick this up with you later.

Anna Fjortoft Spelthorne BC: On BNG we have x3 borough-owned habitat bank sites to register in the next month or two. Agreements (S.106), and unit pricing still to work through; so would also welcome standardisation across Sy. We are still thinking about AI Dash which would be a good tool to ascertain any intentional degradation, and it is free for local authorities. [actually no longer the case.]. Spelthorne intend to recruit an in-house planning ecologist – possibly shared with another borough. Also looking to declare an 'ecological emergency' for Spelthorne. We are looking at incorporating Miyawaki forests (tiny forests). We are supporting SANG to increase monitoring.

David Page EBC: I will get you an Local Plan update. Oak Processionary Moth; we now employ a seasonal officer to keep on top of this, but the only change on spraying policy concerns SSSIs. Molesey Reservoir has seen progress; the community led management group is working with the landowner (Thames Water) to formally access the site, so things are going in the right direction, although nothing is signed yet. All my Adders on Esher Common have survived the winter; this reintroduction has been a complete success. We are now monitoring their dispersal.

Ross Baker & Lynn Whitfield, Surrey Bat Group: The Bat Conservation Trust have issued guidance notes for species selection for LNRS based which can be [viewed here](#). This was originally based on IUCN threatened and near threatened species, but, at our request, has been extended to include the recently discovered Alcahoie bat, which appears to have its UK stronghold in Surrey and West Sussex. BCT have prepared a species information sheet for LNRS purposes which can be downloaded [click here](#). We have recently commenced our 2024 field survey season and this year are focussing on Alcahoie where we have been granted permission to fit radio tags to a maximum of four animals in order to gather more data on their roosting ecology. So far our results have been disappointing, but we suspect this is because of the cold night-time temperatures in early May, and we hope to have more success later in the month if temperatures increase. Following issues in getting a national licence to continue with the National Nathusius (Pipistrelle) Monitoring Project, we have successfully obtained a licence of our own to enable us to resume work studying the migratory behaviour of the species. Our study sites for this are Claremont Landscape Garden in Esher and Molesey Reservoirs. We were very pleased to catch and ring eight Nathusius' at our first session at Molesey, which remains our best site for the species.

Dave Williams, Surrey Dormouse Group: SDG continues to monitor dormouse populations, and trying to halt their decline by small-scale habitat improvements. We are particularly concerned that the very wet conditions in February 2024 have affected the hibernation survival.

Tom Childs GBC: We have one GBC habitat bank waiting on a legal agreement, where we have an option with either SCC or Waverley BC to share functions. On that site was had an issue with Thames Water routeing a pipeline, because of utilities' free reign beyond eg. SSSIs. Under The Levelling Up/Regeneration Act, new duty on utilities to contribute to restoration of natural landscape. Elsewhere, an EA fish-pass was breached, EA working on reparation of that. GBC is working with SBG to install a bat bunker to the side of a hill. As yet no decision on Former Wisley Airfield [subsequently, appeal PE upheld to non-determination/planning application for 1750 houses is therefore granted]. We are presently costing for our habitat bank, but we will need to formalise BNG unit availability for this.

Action: VG to pick up 106 agreements with LD.



Andi Roy, RBC: We are about to take our new ‘meadow management’ policy to ?Environmental Committee, and hope that this will then provide impetus for training our in-house grounds maintenance team to better manage our larger semi-natural green spaces. We also intend to apply for stewardship funding across a much larger swathe of our landholdings this year. We are applying for a grant from the Water Restoration Fund (funded by Thames Water plc prosecution fines), to employ a consultant to make recommendations for improving the Council’s management of riparian corridors for their ecology and for flood alleviation. If successful, we would then hope to apply for a second round of funding to implement these recommendations, as well as funding some works ourselves.

Chertsey Meads SNCI/LNR is recovering well post-Esso pipeline replacement, and is an interesting case study in soil disturbance and seed bank reactivation – worth a visit for any botanists!

Our new Tree Officer is engaging with the ecology section, and we are investigating options for strategic disease-resistant Elm planting around our x2 known White-letter Hairstreak populations.

Simon Elson - Independent: Am no longer part of the Molesey reservoirs group (mentioned by DP above). Recovery of wetland interest on Reigate Heath SSSI is going from strength to strength; where Natural England have reversed on unit deletion proposal, and intends to extend SSSI instead. Also independently supporting R&BBC regarding BOA policy and implementation.

Victoria Hawkins, NE Heathland Connections Manager: Progress signing things off regarding the Super-National Nature Reserve proposal, gaining legal commitment of partners. We will be submitting a Landscape Recovery (round 3) bid, working together with James Herd at SWT. On that, we are waiting for Defra’s application criteria and dates. National Highways has agreed to envision/create a ‘heathland corridor’. MoD has signed on as an affiliated partnership to contribute where they can in their landscape.

Ann Bailey, SCC: Presently BNG-focused, which will link with VG’s update, the keystone habitat baseline exercise has gone well so far.

Viv Greenough, SCC: Have been focusing on issues under present discussion for a while; legal agreements, SCC hosting a Surrey-wide register for BNG habitat banks, etc. I am the lead ecologist working on SCC’s response into proposed Gatwick expansion project. Surrey Local Sites Partnership is back up-&-running (see 3). Proposed nature reserve on Northey Fields in Ewell has seen a recent hiatus, but the project team will be reconvening very soon. Countryside Estates is involved in managing for Ash Dieback, working at Norbury park, for progression this Autumn. We are supporting Highways teams, mostly with bats and badgers issues; supporting our flood mgmt. team also. There is so much ecology work, and we are having to preferentially allocate staff to set tasks. **SE** – On Ash Dieback, are there any monitored signs of tree immunity? **VG** - Only dead trees are being felled; trees within 30 metres of roads, in parks, and public rights of way. Any ‘good trees’ are being left. **LC-G** - Please can you circulate the formal update from SCC on Ash dieback?

Action: VG to speak to LCG on Ash dieback.

Ann Sankey, Surrey Botanical Society: I have submitted some invited comments to the SCC RTS team, concerning grassland/meadows south of Thorpe Hay Meadow SSSI. Elsewhere, we are voluntarily recording species-rich grasslands for the Ancient Grasslands Inventory.

Stewart Cocker, E&EBC: Have good news and bad; bad news is NE contacted us in February to say that NNR enlargement proposal to include Epsom Common LNR has not gone through. Good news concerns the wetland restoration project on the River Hogsmill. April launch had 300 people in attendance. 26/06/24 Nonsuch Park recorders day, details to follow. Also council now owns a flail collector.

Defra has contacted us to ‘study ticks’ on Epsom Common, and suggested they do Ashtead Common NNR. Feedback is there are ‘a lot’(!) Of concern because of exposure to Lyme disease in our area. We have Nightingales ‘back’ (=on passage) at Horton Country Park and Ashtead Common.

Alistair Kirk SBIC: Also involved in Nonsuch Park recorders day, with Sarah Clift. Ancient Grasslands Inventory - further funding has been secured. There was a training day for a survey app we are trialling. Surrey Nightingale survey, with Space4Nature; a citizen science project with SWT. Bioblitz due at Hampton Estate, 01/07/24. There was also a Recorders Lunch at Hampton estate. SBIC and SWT all part of the wider Heathland Connections project.



7.	<p>Planning for Field Day 2024. Helen Cocker has suggested a visit to Headley Warren private chalk grassland nature reserve. Downland CP is managing the site for the owner. This could be coupled with parking/visit to SWT's Nower Wood Env. Education Centre.</p>	
6.	<p>AOB. MW: SWT held a Research & Monitoring collaborators' show-case day at Royal Holloway recently. Well-attended and saw some good presentations. Hoped to become an annual event. LS: On Banstead Common we intend to legally/formally ban commercial dog walkers. Lucy to speak to the Parks & Countryside Managers Forum on this. AS - What is the NT stance on dog walkers? MW to find out.</p>	<p>Actions: ZW to invite Lucy to the forum. MW to investigate NT on commercial dog-walkers.</p>
	<p>DoNM; Back by popular demand! 10th July 2024 BioWG Field Day. Location: Headley Warren, meeting at Nower Wood car park. Nower Wood, Mill Way, Leatherhead, Surrey, KT22 8QA. Timings: 10.30-13.30. BioVWG formal meeting: September 11th, 13:30-16:00, Location: TBC (Woodhatch requested)</p>	
	<p>Abbreviata BNG – Biodiversity Net Gain; EEBC Epsom & Ewell; EBC Elmbridge; FE Forestry England; GBC Guildford; GCN – Great Crested Newt; MVDC Mole Valley; R&BBC; 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.</p>	