



SBIS BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Meeting held at Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Brooke House, Ashbocking
IP6 9JY

13 November 2018

Present

Simone Bullion (SBu)	Suffolk Wildlife Trust	Desi Reed (DR)	East Suffolk Council
Adrian Chalkley (AC)	Suffolk Naturalists' Society	Martin Sanford (MS)	SBIS
Tim De-Keyzer (TDK)	SCC	Chris Strachan (CS)	Environment Agency
Jane Mason (JMa)	SBIS		

Apologies: Sarah Barker (SBa) IBC, Gen Broad (GB) SBIS, Peter Garrett (PG) Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils, Helen Jacobs (HJ) Essex & Suffolk Water, Jacqui Miller (JM) RSPB, Andrew Murray-Wood (AMW) SCC, Damien Parker (DP) St Edmundsbury BC, Gary Quilter (GQ) St Edmundsbury BC, Kate Riddington (KR) Ipswich Museum

MS: apologised for the lack of a Board meeting over the past year. This has been due to a number of key people leaving and the subsequent need to concentrate on the day-to-day running of the Service. The following Members have left: Dorothy Casey (Suffolk Wildlife Trust) and Alison Collins (Natural England) both retired, and Nick Collinson (Suffolk County Council) and Ben Heather (SBIS) moved to new jobs at the end of last year.

1. Introductions, election of new Chair

MS: JMa replaced Ben Heather as Biological Records Officer (GIS) at SBIS in the New Year, and TDK recently replaced Nick Collinson as Head of Natural Environment at SCC. Thanks were extended to Nick for his work as Chair of the Board.

MS: We don't know if Alison Collins will be replaced and this is a cause for concern.

TDK: meeting Helen Dixon, Suffolk Team Manager, Natural England, in Norwich in a few weeks and will discuss this.

DR was proposed and accepted as new Chair.

2. Updated Terms of Reference (Attachment A)

MS: should the Board be re-named to Steering Group? "Board" might imply Councillor level rather than Officer level.

TDK: retaining "Board" is appropriate as it has been in use for so long.

MS: if a vote is necessary, should there be a quorum?

It was decided that this wasn't practical, but that opinion should be canvassed if a decision needs to be made.

MS will put a slightly amended version of the ToR on the website.

TDK: key partners and others could be mentioned.

MS: would prefer SBIS to be steered according to qualification rather than financial contribution.

3. Minutes of the last meeting ([28th June 2017 Attachment B](#))

The minutes were agreed to be an accurate record of the meeting.

Matters arising

- **Item 6. Planning training sessions were being organised, to include BCS (Biodiversity Checking Service) information, but GB has been on sick leave so promotion of the BCS has been postponed until 2019.**
- **Item 7. SBu now has a less ambitious target of 100 CWS sites to survey due to Leonie Washington (a former surveyor) having left Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT).**
- **ALL other actions complete**

4. Memorandum of Agreement (Attachment C)

MS has received feedback only from RSPB. It may be best to defer signing the MoA as many organisations are in a state of flux, with local authority mergers and name changes and SBIS soon to start moving to The Hold. Ipswich BC will be changing their contribution from in kind office space to cash.

DR: East Suffolk are happy to contribute £14k in the same way and other councils seem to think the same, so income from district councils should remain the same after mergers. Clarification from West Suffolk required.

CS: Environment Agency has already signed the MoA.

MS: Marina Flamank of EA is working on a framework document to restructure the Agency's payments to LERCs over the next few years. The aim is to reduce the disparity in payments across the country. This should mean the amount SBIS receives will increase slightly.

Action MS: to provide the final version of the MoA.

5. SBIS Update

MS: the number of records held in the SBIS database has recently exceeded 4 million – much of the recent additions comprises half a million 2015-2016 BirdTrack records and c. 200,000 moth records from 2012-2017. Data supply varies greatly from year to year, and there is a long time-lag due to validation processes, so the records added to the system in any one year usually cover a number of earlier years.

MS presented a map of the records used in data searches to demonstrate the uneven distribution of records, much of which is due to the location of recording effort. Therefore, the data needs to be used with caveats in mind.

Most of the work carried out by SBIS is consultancy work, with numbers of searches on the increase – there has been a 25% increase compared with the same 6-month period last year, and a steady increase over the past 8 years. Andy Mercer is now employed 2 part-days a week to help with data analysis and commercial data searches, freeing JMa to carry out more challenging outreach work.

Not all neighbouring BRCs are experiencing this same rise in demand for searches. This could be because of the increasing amount of development in Suffolk, but also the low prices and fast turnaround offered by SBIS – prices have not increased over the period that income has increased.

A map showing NERC Act species distribution illustrated location hotspots. While some of this is due to gaps in recording, it is largely a true reflection of the location of rare and protected species e.g. the hotspots of the Gipping and Lark valleys.

MS outlined the change in computer systems, hosted by Suffolk County Council, for the biological recording software "Recorder". First, Recorder was moved from a PC to a new laptop. But to allow the software to be networked so others can access it, it was then moved to a virtual server.

Now SCC want to move Recorder to a SQL Cluster, and are currently migrating the database to a database server.

Many records now arrive in digital format and can be imported to Recorder via the Import Wizard. However, because each record isn't checked by this process, visual record-checking is still needed, and much of the training for Recorder is in this.

The SBIS Flickr group is a very useful resource with over 10,000 photos in the group – contributors agree to the pictures being used in non-commercial publications and pictures arrive quickly, making it a good way of disseminating topical news. Flickr has recently been bought out, and one change will be a charge (of £27 for the first year) for storing more than 1000 pictures. Some pictures may be deleted, affecting some links.

A Suffolk Rookery Survey is planned, and MS is creating a web page for recording rookeries. The Drupal content management system is rather cumbersome, and updates need to be done manually, taking down the website, applying the update, and putting it back up.

A recent GIS data acquisition has been the Dudley Stamp 1933 Land Utilisation Survey of Britain. This is for non-commercial use, and could be very beneficial for ecological networking, landscape restoration projects, parish plans and the history of parishes. MS demonstrated the data on a map where land use changes since 1933 could be seen clearly. SBIS supports parishes with, for example, biodiversity searches and Dudley Stamp information could also be provided to SBU for Neighbourhood Plans. Alice Coleman carried out a second land use survey in the 1960s, but it is less complete and not available in digital format.

The East Anglian Planning and Biodiversity Seminar 2018, held jointly with Norfolk County Council and Place Services Essex County Council in collaboration with the Association of Local Government Ecologists (ALGE), will take place on Thursday 22nd November at the University of Suffolk, Waterfront, Ipswich.

SBIS will eventually be moving, along with Suffolk Record Office (SRO), to The Hold, on which construction has begun. SBIS staff were being managed by SRO manager Kate Chantry until Tim De-Keyzer was appointed. The project has won Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) funding so there is an interest in community involvement. SBIS will be helping with the digitised and georeferenced map information held by the Record Office and hoping to integrate this data in an interactive on-line digital map. There are various examples, but of note is Bristol's "[Know Your Place](#)" which includes archive, archaeological and historical layers, but also layers contributed by the public. This is of relevance to HLF funding, which could therefore be requested for a similar project in Suffolk.

SBIS/SNS Recording Bursaries for the over-25s with Field Studies Council: there are still some available – MS is awaiting a report from Flatford Mill to see how much funding is left. AC was working with two people who reached their recording targets. SBIS then benefits from the data they send back.

6. Progress on [The Hold](#)

MS: HLF funding has been agreed and construction has begun. There is also University of Suffolk (UoS) involvement as they are sharing part of the building for a new lecture theatre. Opening is projected to be early 2020, when SBIS will move into the building. MS showed illustrations and aerial photography.

SBU and AC: bat and swift boxes could be included in the building.

CS: this is a good opportunity to create links with UoS.

MS: SBIS has had meetings with tutors on the new Wildlife, Conservation and Ecology course, Drs Nic Bury, Chris Turner and Mark Bowler, and they have links with SNS. UoS have equipment which they could loan out. SBU is teaching on this course.

Science is expanding at UoS; Biology and Ecology are now offered with Science, which distinguishes it from other local courses. Dr Nic Bury is conducting an interesting study of the accumulation of pharmaceutical residues in water shrimps.

Action MS: provide an update at the next Board meeting.

7. Budget (Attachments D1 & D2)

2017/18 - a good profit of £6595 was made because income increased and there was less expenditure, due mainly to staff leaving.

2018/19 - £15,327 rolled forward to 2018/19. Actual income from consultancy was 55% of predicted income for the year after the first 6 months. MS predicted that income will continue to rise, so the budget is healthy.

There is £89,962 in reserve, predicted to increase again.

There will be packing and transport costs incurred during the move to The Hold.

SBu: The Field Studies Council hold the Recording Bursaries budget.

TDK: The Hold hosting costs are currently unknown and therefore need to be regarded as a risk.

SBIS has contingency budget for this, but there have been no detailed discussions yet. There will in addition be consumable costs, such as telephones.

JMa explained the work being done for the Orchards East (OE) project, including creating maps for surveyors and a GIS layer of the Suffolk Traditional Orchards Group (STOG) data. The project is HLF-funded, and SBIS are charging £4000 for this work, £2000 of which have already been spent in hours worked by JMa and Andy Mercer.

In summary, SBIS finances are healthy.

8. [County Wildlife Sites](#) re-survey and rewrites

SBu: SWT with MS had agreed that the early 1990s descriptions need updating. Surveying and re-writes have been delayed as SWT has also seen staff changes, with former surveyor Leonie Washington having left. However, Susan Stone has a huge amount of experience and still has an input to CWS. Tracey Housley is now working on the project and has valuable experience in working with landowners and communities.

Non-statutory sites, after protest at their exclusion, are now included in the re-drafted National Planning Policy Framework as "Locally Designated Sites". SBu thought this is a good start and likes the name as it reflects the sites' value to the local community.

MS: the register needs to be updated as the information goes out to consultants. If there is a legal challenge, the information used needs to be up-to-date. MS gave the recent example of the Lowestoft Harbour Kittiwake Colony site for which the Inspector at the Waveney Examination could find no details on the original designation in the evidence. No further evidence about this could be found to present to the inspector, other than the current brief citation.

SBu asked if SBIS would be prepared to fund Tracey Housley 45 days a year for the re-writes, almost match-funding the amount put in by SWT. An effort will be made to visit as many as possible, with the priority being c. 100 "red", or high-risk, sites where the habitat may have changed but nothing is known, making a visit urgent. In addition, a further 100, where a little is known, will be targeted for amendments.

SBu would like to start in January 2019. All inappropriate, such as time-sensitive (e.g. 'recently coppiced'), language should be removed.

The aim is to have confidence in all the descriptions.

MS: some of this could be done by key word searches in the database. The standardised CWS Condition Assessment Form will highlight some language which needs to be removed.

Of the remaining c. 750, c. 200 have recently been re-written and c. 500 are ancient woodland, for many of which it may only be necessary to remove time-sensitive etc. language.

MS made a declaration of interest as he is now Chair of the CWS Panel.

SBu made a declaration of interest as she is employed by SWT.

The CWS Panel has seen some changes as Leonie Washington (ex-SWT) and Alison Collins (ex-Natural England) have left.

The importance of Natural England's involvement with CWS was discussed. Non-statutory sites need NE's recognition, but NE now is currently not able to support the Partnerships – yet NE has been an important influence in their development.

All present approved the proposal for re-survey and re-writes.

SSSI and CWS double designations:

MS: at the last Panel meeting it was agreed to remove sites falling under the double designation of SSSI and CWS. This came about because the original SSSI designation for forests was only for birds, so extra designation was necessary. However, this has since been broadened to include other species, making CWS designation unnecessary.

JMa has done some GIS analysis which found parts of double-designated sites which were not covered by SSSI. Some of these may still need to be included in CWS designation after the rest of the site is removed. A list of these areas will be provided once the analysis is complete.

Most of the forest CWS will be removed from the register, so the total area of CWS in the County will be greatly reduced.

Discussion re. invertebrates, but it was pointed out that the new SSSI citations do include these.

Roadside Nature Reserves (RNR):

A botanical survey of all sites in 2017 has led to some recommendations. MS did not anticipate big changes.

Action: SBIS to complete double designation analysis and provide a list of areas to be retained.

9. [NBN Atlas](#) progress

MS gave a demonstration of the Atlas which is maintained by the NBN Trust. It is modelled on an Australian data sharing site.

The Atlas data includes 2.5 million records supplied by SBIS. Because Atlas data must be open to all and there is no guarantee against leakage, the resolution of the SBIS data is restricted or degraded to tetrad (2km) level.

There is global access and interaction through the Atlas - SBIS data is acknowledged in the citations of 56 scientific papers on GBIF (Global Biodiversity Information Facility).

The appointment of Professor Sir John Lawton as the new Patron is good news.

NBN is investigating providing contributors with access controls so that SBIS may be able to make higher resolution data available to selected users in future.

NBN is looking at monetising the data via commercial users, which will lead to a discussion between local BRCs and NBN.

CS: would EA be able to download the data?

MS: yes, theoretically - one portal for sharing SBIS data would be an improvement on our 6-monthly updates for partners.

SBu: would commercial users need to ask SBIS?

MS: SBIS would access the data for commercial users.

The NBN is still a work in progress. For example, NBN still hasn't provided the translation for the Darwin Core standard data format. MS would also like to be able to provide incremental updates rather than replacing the whole dataset every time we add new data.

10. Ecological Networking

MS: delivering a more effective ecological network was included in Defra's 2010 "Making Space for Nature" report, and the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan policy paper includes plans for a Nature Recovery Network.

MS has discussed possible Suffolk ecological networks with Conor Crowther, Planning Policy & Delivery Officer at East Suffolk Councils. All Districts should be implementing networking, and in the same way. Other counties have looked at it and MS showed some examples of the range of approaches.

CS: Norfolk carried out a big exercise.

MS: SBIS carried out habitat opportunity mapping for heathland.

However, such exercises can be quite academic, without much influence over landowners and therefore with limited outcomes.

DR: Waveney DC looked at biodiversity corridors and networking as part of their Green Infrastructure Strategy with a view to expanding the work across East Suffolk.

TDK: a tactical approach could be taken, looking at where developments are likely to be, for example Sizewell.

MS: what is done in theory and in practice should be joined up and Districts need to consider what they will use the networks for.

DR: looking at what else could be done as a local authority, the influence is through developments where there are the opportunities to build networks.

MS: the two approaches need to be joined up. Action is needed across a large area of the UK. Suggested a working group to look at what is needed.

TDK asked what local authorities were already doing.

DR: Norfolk has been doing green infrastructure work.

MS: this has other drivers and isn't specifically ecological networking.

The 25 Year Environment Plan requires the network to fulfil wildlife, economic and social needs.

CS: the network has to be enshrined in regulation or promote the concept of networks when there is a development – there should be a principle of networking.

We therefore need to carry out mapping or promote the concept.

TDK: the varying needs for species also needs to be considered, and at what scale the development needs to be – e.g. it would be different for birds and bees.

CS: it should be possible to do this – it's a bigger task for land to be set aside.

The Plan also includes expanding Nature Improvement Areas.

TDK: there is also a shift away from agi-environment schemes towards supporting this approach.

MS: landowners want ecosystem services. There is scope to incorporate regional mitigation schemes and perhaps district-level licensing for GCN.

CS: the principles of networking could be included in the Parish Neighbourhood Plans.

MS: Plans shouldn't stop at the parish boundaries.

CS: there is a need to move away from "nimbyism" in parishes.

MS: Neighbourhood Plans need to incorporate change as well as protecting existing resources – this is an opportunity to make things better.

MS and CS: agreed this would be a good idea.

MS: at present it is dependent on whether there is an interested person in the district or parish.

Proposal: a Working Group on Ecological Networking. However, SBIS couldn't do this on its own. It could be suggested at the Planning and Biodiversity Seminar to gather opinion.

SBIS could work on areas such as mapping and data, but it will need users to be the driving force.

Action: SBU to forward the Permeability Report to MS.

11. CIEEM [Guidelines on accessing biodiversity data](#)

MS wanted to bring these CIEEM (Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management) guidelines to everyone's attention and showed the document on screen. The guidelines are targeted at groups such as consultants. Re. section 4, some consultants are sharing their survey data with SBIS. Local Authorities could insist that data is shared.

AC asked if the data is of a consistent standard.

MS: all data is variable, and some is very poor.

MS: re. section 8, a requirement to submit survey data could be included in the consultants' Terms and Conditions. Any fee they ask would have to be included in the local authority's fee.

SBU: there is already a need to gather evidence.

MS: that is different from specifying a requirement.

DR: it could stipulate which level of development it is required for.

MS: the survey data should also be shared in a useful format e.g. a standardised spreadsheet, not (as is often the case) a lengthy PDF document.

DR and SBU: this could be raised in a planning group. There is a joint Development Planning/Development Management Officer Group which meets regularly. This would be the best forum to achieve a common approach across the county.

(TDK left at 16.35)

DR and CS: discussion on how much to insist on data sharing and quality of surveys.

12. AOB

JMa asked for non-GIS District contacts for sending out the data update letters to.

SBU: the representatives on the Planning Sub-group would be best.

MS: Gen Broad can supply the contact group.

Action: JMa to ask GB for contact group.

13. Date of next meeting

2nd April 2019

SBU: suggested SWT Ashbocking again and will book the room

This was agreed with a time of 2pm.

DR: thanked SWT for hosting the meeting.