

SBIS BOARD MEETING MINUTES

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

2 April 2019

Present

Gen Broad (GB)	SBIS	Gary Quilter (GQ)	West Suffolk Council
Simone Bullion (SBu)	Suffolk Wildlife Trust	Desi Reed (DR)	East Suffolk Council
Adrian Chalkley (AC)	Suffolk Naturalists' Society	Kate Riddington (KR)	Ipswich Museum
Peter Garrett (PG)	Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils	Martin Sanford (MS)	SBIS
Tim De-Keyzer (TDK)	SCC	Chris Strachan (CS)	Environment Agency
Jane Mason (JMa)	SBIS		

Apologies: Sarah Barker (SBa) IBC, Helen Jacobs (HJ) Essex & Suffolk Water, Jacqui Miller (JM) RSPB, Andrew Murray-Wood (AMW) SCC.

1. Apologies and Introductions

Everyone introduced themselves around the table.

2. Minutes of the last meeting ([13th November 2018 Attachment A](#))

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

Matters arising

- **Item 6 (p.2) Planning training sessions were being organised, to include BCS (Biodiversity Checking Service) information, but as GB was on sick leave until mid Feb, promotion of the Service has been delayed.**
- **Item 8 (p.5) SBIS has completed the initial deletion of CWSs which are also SSSIs. The work to assess the remaining areas of CWSs is ongoing.**
- **Item 10 (p.7) The Permeability Report was identified as possibly being a Natural England report. SBu to confirm and send to MS.**
- **ALL other actions complete**

3. SBIS Update

SBIS Database

MS: the work to update records is ongoing, the SBIS database currently has well over 4 million records. There is now consistently more input from ecological consultancies, who are providing useful data, although much of it is focused on species of conservation concern. The 6-monthly update for SLA partners is due to go out in April.

SBu: SWT will submit the outstanding water vole records shortly.

MS: the SBIS records have not been uploaded onto the NBN for over a year. This is because all the existing records must be deleted and replaced by the new ones, which takes two days of

computer time. New software to be introduced in spring 2019 should make this easier, so MS aims to do this work soon. SBIS owns approximately 2.75 million records which will be uploaded. MS has downloaded Suffolk data from national datasets on the NBN. NBN employs surprisingly few people and suffers from a lack of resources.

MS warned that comparison of data using SBIS layers covering the last 20 years with NBN data (which is not time limited to the last 20 years) may produce some confusing results.

There are also dangers in assuming that data on the National Atlas has even coverage across the country. For example, the Ipswich Star featured an article [Ipswich tops list of urban wildlife hot-spots with over 3,000 species >](#) which drew its information from the NBN without looking at the variation in data supply. This is clearly a reflection of where the recorders are, rather than a reflection of the urban areas' relative numbers of species.

County Wildlife Site Project

MS: It was agreed at the last meeting that the double designation of SSSIs and CWSs should stop. This work is underway and the remaining areas of CWSs not included in SSSIs will be assessed. This action will reduce the area of CWSs in the county dramatically.

SBIS/SNS Recording Bursaries for the over-25s with Field Studies Council

MS: There has been a good take-up of the courses. There is £4,623 left for this year, so there should not be a shortage of funds.

SBu: Flatford Mill has reduced the number of adult courses that they run. It is not known if this has affected any of the courses which SBIS/SNS support.

MS: Students who are members of SNS can now attend study centres outside Suffolk if appropriate courses are offered, although the required number of records must be from Suffolk. This is a worthwhile project to raise the numbers of skilled recorders in Suffolk. There could be a shortage of recorders in future years.

SNS Conference 2020

The Suffolk Naturalists' Society conference has been booked for 29th Feb 2020 at Wherstead Park, Ipswich. The theme is verges – the title is 'On the Verge of Success'. The conference will be open to local and national audiences with the aim of influencing decision makers.

Action: SBu to send the contact details for Highways / Kier to MS

Action: All to think about potential topics and appropriate speakers and advise MS.

SBIS Contributions

Later this week, MS and JMa will be hosting a meeting of the East Anglian Local Environmental Record Centres at Ipswich Museum. There are shared Service Level Agreements with Anglian Water and the Environment Agency (EA).

The EA has increased its contribution to £8,700.

Ipswich Borough Council is aware that the Council will need to make a financial contribution to SBIS when the move is made to The Hold as they will then no longer be hosting SBIS. SBa has reported that her manager is aware of the situation.

Suffolk Rookery Survey

MS: The Suffolk Rookery Survey is underway and a web page has been created for recording rookeries as well as a map showing current and historical records. MS demonstrated the web page and asked for everyone to participate. The survey will be running for 2 years.

4. Progress on [The Hold](#)

MS: showed a time-lapse video of The Hold being built over several months.
The move is still on schedule for spring 2020.

5. Budget (Attachments B1 & B2)

2018/19 – the predicted expenditure was £126 k compared to the actual expenditure of £115 k. £6 k is being held over to Aug 2019 for the payment to SWT for the CWS re-writes.

The predicted income was reasonably accurate, being only approximately £4 k less than expected. The predicted amount was £126 k, whilst the actual income was £122 k to date and is still continuing to rise. There is currently a £7, 038 surplus. The reserve is healthy at almost £90 k. The predicted expenditure for 2019/2020 is approximately £125 k, while the predicted income is approximately £124 k. See attached spreadsheets for details.

Andy Mercer is employed 2 days a week to help with data searches. These are very time consuming but bring in a good income.

Sbu: there is added value from records coming in from the consultants.

DR: demand will continue to rise as developments increase.

MS: there is increasingly an expectation that data searches will be undertaken by consultants.

TDK: Biodiversity Net Gain will be mandated in the upcoming Environment Bill which will mean a corresponding increase in the use of SBIS services.

MS: SBIS is relatively cheap and have a quick turn-around which means that consultants tend to use the service and the data.

JMa: two reports can be run at the same time, so there is capacity to increase the numbers of reports produced if necessary.

DR: the budget assumes the same level of contributions from districts. East Suffolk Council is planning to pay double i.e. the same amount that Waveney and Suffolk Coastal Councils have paid in total in the past.

Action: GQ to check with Damien Parker if West Suffolk Council is planning to similarly double their contribution.

MS confirmed that he had assumed that East and West Suffolk Councils contributions would remain the same in total as in previous years.

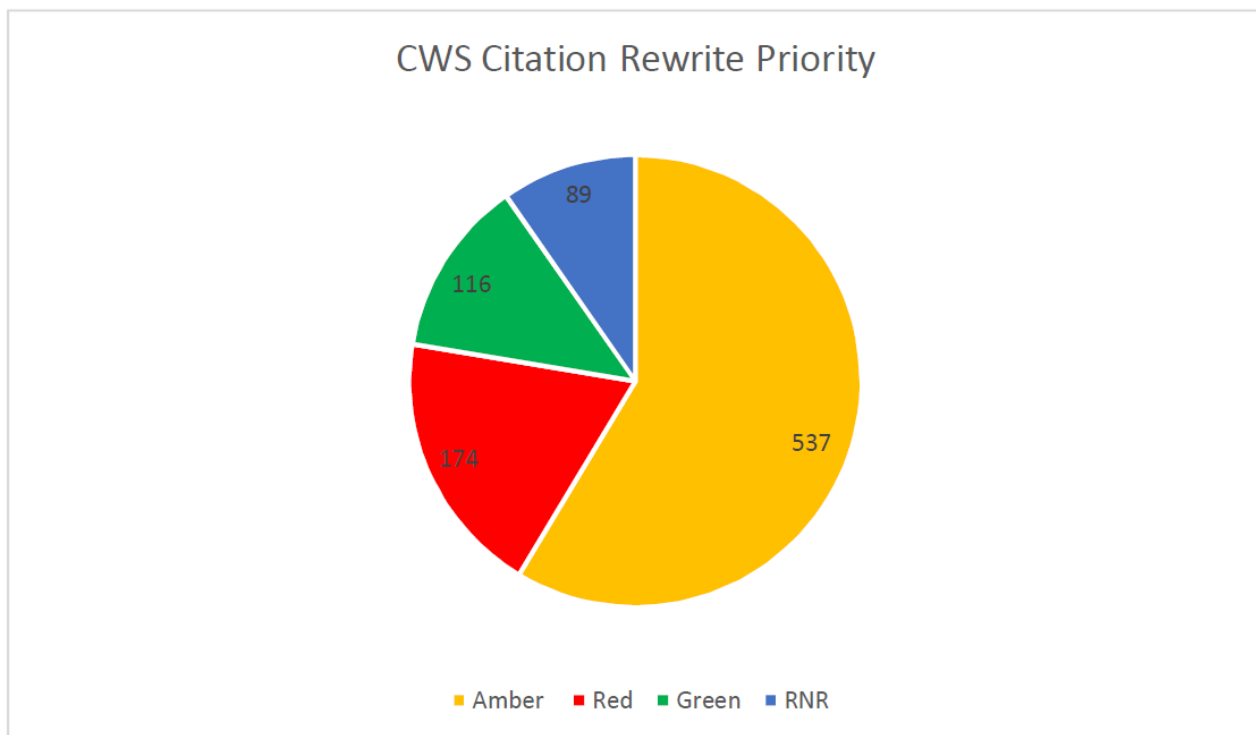
TDK: the reserve amount is substantial; a decision must be made as to how to use this.

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

SBU: Tracey Housley has been working hard over the past few months. There are 916 CWSs, excluding the Roadside Nature Reserves, which have recently been surveyed.

The spreadsheet has been colour coded to indicate the status of visits; MS showed a pie chart of the relative percentages. Red indicates priority sites which need visiting (174 sites), yellow indicates sites which are of a less immediate priority (537 sites) and green indicates that the site has been visited and fits the criteria (116 sites).

- Breakdown of 916 sites



Tracey has removed all time dated phrases, such as ‘recently coppiced’. This would now read ‘the site is managed under a coppicing regime’.

50 CWS citations have been re-written, some of these have been visited, others have had the style updated.

SBU will visit CWSs if she is in the area, but Tracey is doing all of the re-writing.

The work is going well, everything is recorded on the Smartsheet which can be accessed by all CWS Panel members.

There are a large number of woodlands about which not much is known, many have not been visited at all as they are privately owned. These are in the amber list.

SBU: there is a short survey period for woodland sites which starts in April. It is late to start surveying now, so the re-survey should focus on these sites in 2020.

Summary of district CWS status:

Waveney	Surveys were completed relatively recently for the market towns and Lowestoft.
Ipswich	The Wildlife Audit was updated by the rangers in 2018.
Babergh and Mid Suffolk	There is a lack of knowledge of these sites.
Forest Heath	Large numbers have recently been surveyed.
St Edmundsbury	The Council recently commissioned surveys of 50 / 60 sites.
Suffolk Coastal	Surveys need to be undertaken.

TDK suggested that he may be able to find some funds to survey in areas where development is taking place.

MS suggested it is better to fund skilled surveyors rather than the Norfolk model of training people under HLF funding. This will provide better quality data.

SBU: the SWT format of an extended Phase 1 survey, with a 2-3-page report has been used since 2000. It was agreed that this format works well.

Bosqmap can interact with Mapinfo, so it will be possible to share data between SWT and SBIS.

PG asked how many sites are involved for the Babergh and Mid Suffolk area.

SBU: this is a diffuse land area with a series of market towns and expansion areas. It is difficult to judge how many sites are involved.

DR: it may be too late to inform the Local Plans for Waveney and Suffolk Coastal areas.

SBU: the drivers are development and the CWS register itself.

MS: woodlands have always been considered not to change, but they probably have changed dramatically with the recent expansion of numbers of deer. The ground flora is a barometer for change rather than the trees themselves.

Rob Cooke did many good Phase 2 level woodland surveys in the 1990s.

It was agreed that some woodland surveys should be undertaken this year as a pilot to establish the resource required to do a full survey.

SBU: SWT has two good surveyors who can provide consistent survey data.

MS: £5,000 could be used for the re-surveys from reserve funds.

Action: SBU to check if SWT could contribute funds to the project.

Action: SBU to draft a project proposal for woodland surveys.

SBU: as a rough guide, the £5 k will cover about 20 days of work, which means that 20-30 woods could be surveyed. It would be sensible to focus on a cluster of woodlands. However, it would be a windfall opportunistic situation as to which woods can actually be surveyed.

7. Ecological Networking, Biodiversity Net Gain, District Level Licensing

MS: various methods have been used to map ecological networks. MS showed Norfolk's satellite mapping of broad habitats – grassland and heathland, wetland, woodland.

MS: SBIS is concerned to produce a product that is valuable to a range of end users such as local authorities, parishes producing neighbourhood plans, farming estates and private landholders. External consultants may not understand local conditions or what's needed. Networks are needed that work for all wildlife, not only particular suites of wildlife.

Great Crested Newt (GCN) District Level Licensing

MS showed an example from CIEEM's In Practice magazine. The aim is to target new ponds in the district where appropriate and not necessarily on the development site. The Natural England eDNA and habitat suitability surveys being undertaken in Suffolk in 2019 as shown on the map are only in the Babergh and Mid Suffolk and East Suffolk areas.

SBU: the surveys are based on where GCN licences have been issued in the last 2 years.

MS: this is supposed to be a 'robust and transparent data strategy', but Natural England (NE) do not oblige licence owners to share their data with their local record centre even though it's one of the conditions of being issued with a licence. MS is following this up with NE.

SBU and MS agreed that eDNA can produce false positives.

SBu: the GCN survey season is 15th April to mid-June with more accurate data obtained early in the season. Surprisingly, NE are not estimating abundance, but are attempting to identify the key areas for GCN and the importance of different populations. For developers, if one pond containing GCN is removed, it has to be replaced by 4 high quality compensatory new ones.

MS: NE are identifying the core and fringe Strategic Opportunity Areas as shown on the illustrated map of North Kent. Monitoring is key to the strategy – this is funded through the licensing scheme.

SBu: it has not yet been decided which agency will hold the funds in Suffolk.

CS: it will be a huge undertaking to find suitable receptor ponds.

TDK: Countryside Stewardship schemes cannot be used to deliver ponds which have been specified as part of a planning condition.

PG: developers do not seem to want to have permanent water in SuDS schemes.

MS showed a case study in the South Midlands which is identifying risk areas for GCN. The scheme is expecting £500,000 in the first year. This will go into an Environment Fund for long term management. £100 k has been made available for 2.6 staff.

MS: the scheme is voluntary at present, so developers can choose whether to pay into an environment pot or to deal with developments on an individual basis.

SBu: GCN should be spreading to the new sites naturally, not through translocation efforts.

MS: we need a map of risk areas, but we are not confident that we can produce such a map from existing data. The government is intending to roll this project out soon. The project would need to liaise closely with SWT and SBIS. The developers would be paying, not the districts.

MS demonstrated how SBIS records reflect recording effort by showing a map of the GCN records for Suffolk. A high density is shown around Sibton and Halesworth (where previous county recorders Rosie Norton and Mark Jones live).

SBu: each eDNA kit costs £170

MS: developers would need to pay £60 k into the environment fund for each scheme.

The project seems designed to make building developments easier rather than to support biodiversity.

GCN district level licensing is one of the drivers for ecological networking projects.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

MS: there has been a big government consultation. The Defra metric used has been under review. There would be an opportunity for developers to pay into a biodiversity pot.

TDK: the difficulty is ensuring that the right project is delivered in the right place, according to the Lawton principles. ([Making space for nature 2010, John Lawton >](#))

GB had attended an excellent BNG workshop hosted by Balfour Beatty in Canary Wharf in April.

The trainers were Julia Baker ([Balfour Beatty and Oxford University](#)), Tom Butterworth ([WSP Global](#)) and Rachel Hoskins ([Footprint Ecology](#)). There was an emphasis on the fact that wildlife and habitats must be understood before applying any numbers (the metric) and that the Mitigation Hierarchy must be applied first in every case. This states that everything must be done to first avoid and then to minimise impacts on biodiversity. Only as a last resort should compensation be made for losses which cannot be avoided. See p. 8.

Ecological networking was mentioned as a good way forward.

The workshop emphasised that monitoring must be costed in early, otherwise it won't be done.

MS: we need to decide on priorities and talk to partners.

TDK: there is an opportunity for Suffolk to say what it is we want to see delivered and in which areas.

DR: The Masterplan approach taken in the Saxmundham and Felixstowe areas can help. This gives an opportunity to decide what is needed from the start. East Suffolk Council is beginning to use this approach already.

MS would like to see a forum to ensure that all priorities are identified alongside new potential opportunities.

DR: it's essential to look at the viability of the sites. There's always a pressure to put in hard structures such as play areas.

TDK: the consultation looked at how the funding should be administered – it has to go into biodiversity projects. SCC sent a response to the consultation.

Action: TDK to send a copy of the consultation response to DR.

SBIS Ecological Network Project

MS: the first step is to hold workshops to consult partners on the product and the methodology. Is a GIS product what's needed? The question is whether planners would want the mapping on their systems or would prefer to consult SBIS for advice.

The product needs to be scalable, so it will work at parish and county level. It would be useful for Neighbourhood Plans and for landowners.

All of these questions could be answered by the workshop outputs. We do not want an academic report that isn't useful.

PG: we need a product that is joined up at parish level.

MS: we must look to the future, rather than trying to reinvent the past, as often happens.

It was agreed to set up a sub-group to take the project further. The group comprises TDK, PG, SBu (subject to time constraints), MS, GB, JMa. More input from the local authorities would be sought.

JMa advised that there is a web portal planned for the districts which might provide opportunities to deliver mapping products online.

8. AOB

DR: The Broads Authority senior ecologist (Andrea Kelly) should be copied in to the SBIS Board minutes and other documents.

SBu: James Meyer is leaving SWT to join East Suffolk Council as their ecologist.

GB confirmed that James has been invited to join the Planning and Biodiversity Group in his new role and that he expects to be able to attend. Conor Crowther now represents East Suffolk Council on the group after Lisa Chandler's resignation.

MS confirmed he had asked Helen Dixon (Natural England) for NE representatives for the CWS Panel and for the SBIS Board. She has passed the request on to the Suffolk Team Leader Chris Bielby.

Action: TDK to follow up with Helen Dixon.

GB: The East Anglian Planning and Biodiversity Seminar 2018 took place on 22nd November at the University of Suffolk, Ipswich. 130 people attended, the largest number to date. This is organised annually between SBIS and Norfolk County Council (NCC). Only 40 evaluations were received, but they provided a useful snapshot of peoples' views. The event is made sustainable by charging consultants £65. There was an overall loss of £208, but this sum was kindly covered by NCC. There was some very positive feedback: "*Exceeded expectations. Far more dynamic than the last time I attended*" and "*Beyond expectations. Very interesting, thought provoking.*"

TDK: some presentations seemed rushed with little time for questions.

GB: it is hard to get the balance right, there are usually some comments saying the day could be squeezed up and others saying more time was needed for questions / networking.

SBu: the event has changed over the 16 years it has been running. Initially it was just for planners, then one or two consultants attended, now they are encouraged to attend. It is now a useful forum for the two groups to meet and network. We maintain a balance of about one third consultants to two thirds planners.

9. Date of next meeting

2nd October 2019 at 2.00 pm

Venue: SWT Ashbocking

From Biodiversity Net Gain, Good Practice Principles for Development, a Practical Guide p. 7

Download the document at <https://cieem.net/biodiversity-net-gain-guidance-published/>

Table 1.2 Applying the mitigation hierarchy

Stage	In practice	Achieving biodiversity gains or net gain at all stages of the mitigation hierarchy
1 Avoidance	This first stage is to avoid harm to biodiversity, for example by locating to an alternative site. It is the most important stage and can ease the consent process, whereas missing this stage can lead to criticism, objections and refusal of permission for the development.	
2 Minimisation	If avoiding all adverse effects is not possible, action is taken to minimise these effects, such as those in the CIEEM EclA guidelines (CIEEM, 2018), which include timing works to avoid sensitive periods.	
3 Compensation	<p>Addressing residual adverse effects is the final stage, only considered after all possibilities for avoiding and minimising the effects have been implemented. Compensation does not prevent the effects, rather it involves measures to make up for residual effects that cannot be prevented.</p> <p>Offsetting is a form of compensation that trades losses of biodiversity in one location with measurable gains in another – biodiversity offsets have a formal requirement for measurable outcomes. Offsetting losses of biodiversity with gains elsewhere can be within or outside of the development footprint.</p>	