



SBIS BOARD MEETING MINUTES

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

2nd October 2019

Present

Gen Broad (GB)	SBIS	Helen Jacobs (HJ)	Essex & Suffolk Water
Simone Bullion (SBu)	Suffolk Wildlife Trust	Jane Mason (JMa)	SBIS
Adrian Chalkley (AC)	Suffolk Naturalists' Society	Anna Rowe (AR)	Ipswich Borough Council
Holly Emmens (HE)	SCC	Martin Sanford (MS)	SBIS
Peter Garrett (PG)	Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils	Gary Quilter (GQ)	West Suffolk Council
Tim De-Keyzer (TDK)	SCC		

Apologies: Sarah Barker (SBa) IBC, Desi Reed (DR) East Suffolk Council, Jacqui Miller (JM) RSPB, Andrew Murray-Wood (AM-W) SCC, Kathryn Riddington (KR) Ipswich Museum, Chris Strachan (CS) Environment Agency, John Jackson (JJ) Natural England

1. Apologies and Introductions

Everyone introduced themselves around the table. JJ is the new Natural England member, but unfortunately could not be present.

2. Minutes of the last meeting (2nd April 2019 Attachment A)

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

Matters arising

- **Item 3 SNS Conference 2020 (page 2)**
MS has completed a Google online questionnaire to circulate to county contacts. This will advertise the event and provide interesting data on how other counties operate. Kier will become Highways England before the end of Feb 2020. The programme has been finalised and tickets are now on sale.
- **Item 5 Budget (page 3)**
GQ confirmed that the combined Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils will pay the same as the two councils were paying individually in the past.
- **ALL other actions complete**

3. SBIS Update

Plant Atlas

MS: There has been a great deal of data coming in over the summer, particularly as there have been new plant surveys for the revised UK-wide plant atlas. This is published every 10 years. MS

has been busy editing the format and validating records. The new version may only be published electronically rather than in hard copy. It is at 10 km resolution.

Website Maintenance

Website maintenance is very time consuming.

Validation of records on the SBIS site can take a long time as they go via iRecord, which does not have many staff or much support.

There has been a huge amount of spam coming through on the enquiry email address and website forms, which are open to the general public. 'Captcha' is supposed to prevent this happening. MS cannot find a way of blocking these.

This is not an SCC website and there is not much resource to develop the website.

Species layers

The new 6-monthly Protected Species and other GIS layers will be released via the website shortly. The SWT water vole data will be included in the next update.

Validation can slow down the process, but MS can accept data at his discretion without validation. iRecord forms a relatively minor part of the data.

If records are subsequently validated, the flag on the record is changed.

Numbers of bug records are increasing due to new identification guides on the market. Suffolk had new records for firebug in Orford and Ipswich in 2019.

Personnel

MS has been in post for 35 years. TDK expressed thanks for all his hard work.

GB is retiring at the end of Feb 2020. MS expressed thanks for her work with SBIS over 12 years.

Recruitment for GB's post needs to be put in place.

SNS Conference 2020

The Suffolk Naturalists' Society conference 'On the Verge of Success' is on 29th Feb 2020 at Wherstead Park, Ipswich. The conference will be open to local and national audiences with the aim of influencing decision makers.

Action: GB to contact Ian Boulton at ALGE to ask if he can circulate the online questionnaire to county ecologists.

4. Progress on The Hold

MS: The building work is coming on fast. A traditional 'topping out' ceremony was held as the highest piece of the roof was fitted. See [Ipswich Star article >](#) The building is on schedule and on budget at present with a completion date in April. SBIS will probably move in during the summer.

5. Budget

For the first six months, outgoings are on target at £55 k – approximately 50% of the year's total predicted expenditure of £125 k.

The consultancy income (at £21.6 k) is down by just under £1 k against the predicted income of £45 k for the year. The total income for the year, including Local Authority contributions, is estimated at approximately £124 k.

JMa: Other record centres have also reported a drop in enquiries.

HJ: Water companies are in the last year of their 5-year cycle, which always causes a dip in activities.

MS: SBIS has a considerable reserve budget and the local authorities have not yet been invoiced. There will be less admin time as there are now only 4 councils.

AR: Sarah Barker has confirmed that IBC expect to be paying a financial contribution in 2020 when the Ipswich Museum hosting of SBIS ceases.

6. County Wildlife Sites re-survey and rewrites

SBu: Tracey Housley is getting on well with the re-writes, having completed 65 out of the target 100 out of date citations.

MS: several new sites have been designated following survey work by Alison Looser (SWT) and SBu.

MS: confirmed that SWT can submit an invoice for half of the agreed sum on the Purchase Order. The woodland Purchase Order has not yet been drawn up.

Action: SBu to send SWT invoice for half of the agreed sum.

7. Woodland Surveys and Potential New CWSs

SBu: the Woodland CWS surveys have finished for the year. Most of the surveys were done by Alison Looser (SWT). This was a pilot study undertaken in Babergh district only to refine the methodology for future surveys. The DAFOR scale is used – see below (researchgate.net)

Species percentage	abundance	DAFOR term	Abbreviation
51-100%		Dominant	D
31-50%		Abundant	A
16-30%		Frequent	F
6-15%		Occasional	O
1-5%		Rare	R
0%		Not present	X

The surveys started in April and finished in June. Flora and fauna species records have been submitted to SBIS in spreadsheet format. The Smartsheet has been updated.

25 sites were surveyed, targeting ancient woodland species.

7 other woodlands were surveyed; of these, 5 were recommended as new CWSs and 1 boundary change was identified.

The surveys produced 1261 records (429 ancient woodland indicators).

The Ancient Woodland layer did not show sites of less than 2 ha in the past.

It has been agreed that Tracey Housley should do all the citation re-writes for consistency.

The area covered includes Bentley, East Bergholt, Shotley peninsula, Hadleigh and Layham.

'Gulls' (deep channels made by streams) are quite common in Suffolk and are often interesting geologically. Polstead gull was notified by TDK.

Most sites had between 6 and 10 numbers of indicator species. The woods growing on sand naturally have fewer species than those growing on clay. Ancient woodland tree indicators include Midland hawthorn, spindle, wild cherry and wild service tree.

Gains in records include hard and soft shield fern, bluebell and hairy St John's wort. Fewer or no records were made for all orchids, sanicle and orpine. This may be due to the pressure of deer grazing.

The pilot study was delivered on target and demonstrated that woodlands are changing although it had been assumed in the past that they would not be changing significantly. The drivers for change are deer presence and climate change.

No CWSs have been de-designated.

Only one landowner refused permission to survey, although a few did not reply.

Next steps

It was agreed the surveys should be extended and should be comparable to past surveys.

MS: It would be good to recruit surveyors and provide training to build capability.

SBU: SWT provided 2 weeks training in biological surveying in 2019 with the involvement of Adrian Knowles (Hymenoptera Recorder). 2 interns have been shadowing the survey work during the summer, although it's difficult for students as field survey times clash with exam times.

Alison Looser had 2 days a week allocated over 3 months; SBU did surveys in her own time. Alison could be allocated 3 days a week for future surveys.

The Board agreed to Phase 2 of the survey. £5,100 is to be paid in 2019. The funding would need to be increased. MS would like to see a partnership project with external funding. The project should start in February 2020.

Action: SBU to discuss the proposal with MS and the final proposal to be submitted to the Board.

MS: Analysis of the results can be published in the journal Suffolk Natural History, possibly 2020, without specifying the locations.

SBU: the owners will be sent the species records from their sites and given feedback about management.

AC: there may be caddis fly larvae in the Polstead gull – we should also be looking at invertebrates.

8. Ecological Network, Biodiversity Net Gain, District Level Licensing

The Ecological Network project has not progressed over the summer following a sub-group meeting. There are a range of audiences and partners. There needs to be consideration of the data format and scalability (parish or county scale). There is some information available on existing project e.g. [West of England Network >](#)

We should be looking at web solutions rather than pdfs, e.g. an internet portal which can operate at district or county level. Callum Davies (MSDC) is investigating how this could work. [Derbyshire's Nature Recovery Network >](#) has an efficient website, whilst [Defra's MAGIC interactive mapping website >](#) is rather clunky. Our target for the future should be a Suffolk web mapping service.

MS has been researching the context and methodology and believes SBIS may not be able to lead on the project due to a lack of resources. Neighbouring counties are working on it, e.g. [Norfolk >](#)

MS: Solutions should be cross-border. Some counties are using the BEETLE (Biological and Environmental Evaluation Tools for Landscape Ecology) suite of tools. This is a 'least-cost focal species approach' which looks at the permeability of the landscape for certain species.

MS has been asked to join a committee advising on the Somerleyton Hall Estate re-wilding project. The estate is currently researching how the land is used and how the public perceive them. Estates such as this should be included as partners in the network project.

A sub-group meeting will be scheduled for the autumn. HJ would like to be involved.

Action: GB to set up a Doodle Poll for the sub-group.

Biodiversity Net Gain

TDK: BNG will be mandated through the new Environment Bill, but this hasn't moved forward yet. The consultation and responses summary have been published – this includes:

- No small site exemption.
- Some valuable brownfield sites will be included.
- There is a 10% starting point.
- Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPS) are out of scope at present, although there is a move to apply the same appraisal to them.
- Stop landowners trying to degrade sites before planning applications.
- The same rules apply on locally valued sites.

HJ: water companies will support BNG and will prioritise this on their own sites. Essex & Suffolk Water (ES&W) would appreciate a steer from the Wildlife Trusts to develop a cohesive strategy which includes external partners. E&SW are not waiting for legislation, they will be starting the project in April.

SBu is similarly working with UK Power Networks to achieve a net gain.

HJ: E&SW is using the Defra metric to rank sites and then to enhance them, so they improve in quality. The plan is to put all existing and new sites through the metric. The company has assessed 90% of their sites. They aim to be realistic about what can be achieved and understand that it shouldn't be assumed that all sites can be improved by 10%.

AR: the Ipswich Greenways plan is still being used.

TDK: Local or on-site mitigation is appropriate with a duty on the relevant public body to deliver. Suffolk is working on a Nature Recovery Network, but there are resource challenges. The government accepts that there must be at least a 30-year commitment to maintaining BNG.

TDK: The government has also consulted on [Conservation Covenants](#) > and these will go ahead where appropriate. For BNG, a national tariff approach was rejected, the aim to be that any tariff approach will be local. The approach must be consistent in valuing of biodiversity units i.e. by using the Defra Metric, a new version of which is still to be finalised.

There will be a public register of all land managed for BNG. There will be a 2-year transition between the law being passed and full implementation

District Level Licensing

TDK: indication from government is that they are not yet ready to mandate District Level Licensing (DLL) , seeking to pilot it further for now. This is likely due to the potential resource implications.

The Suffolk DLL consultation is available. It requires delivery of 10 new ponds.

SBU: SWT is not interested as it is such a small delivery for the amount of work required on a very short timescale. DLL is only applicable to Babergh and Mid Suffolk and East Suffolk areas.

9. AOB

PG: Mid Suffolk and Babergh have declared climate and biodiversity emergencies. PG has mentioned SBIS as a potential partner and would like to see experts speaking at a meeting. See links below:

<https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/news/council-takes-steps-to-protect-wildlife/> and

<https://www.climateemergency.uk/blog/mid-suffolk/>

<https://www.climateemergency.uk/blog/babergh/>

<https://www.eadt.co.uk/news/babergh-council-free-trees-climate-change-1-6303557>

GQ: West Suffolk Council has agreed to declaring a climate emergency and set up a task force to help tackle it:

<https://www.buryfreepress.co.uk/news/climate-emergency-to-be-declared-in-west-suffolk-9077509/>

GQ asked for assistance in finding out how to incorporate biodiversity into the climate change work. MS recommended that GQ look at the work of the East Suffolk Green Print Forum.

Action: GB to send contact details of the Green Print Forum to GQ.

MS: initiatives such as the Green Print Forum must be properly resourced; the use of herbicides and pesticides, the presence of invasive species and cutting regimes should be reviewed. Local Authorities should show a strong lead.

HE: there has been an increase in interest in how Suffolk Highways manage verges, particularly by councillors. New Roadside Nature reserves (RNRs) have been designated e.g. Brandon Industrial Estate.

TDK: Risk assessments have been updated. Any verges which require raking less than 1.2 m from the road will need traffic management operations. There is now budget to replace missing white posts (indicators of RNRs) and to put in new ones.

GB noted that the Planning and Biodiversity seminar will be taking place on 14th November at the University of Suffolk and distributed some flyers.

TDK mentioned the Norfolk and Suffolk Environment Plan which includes New Anglia LEP and the UEA. SBIS and NBIS will be asked to identify key natural habitat and advise on how we should respond to changes on a broad scale. Anglian Water are also working with the UEA. There will be a large event in spring 2020 with opportunities to get more involved after that.

TDK: the [Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Partnership Project >](#) has been successful in obtaining Heritage Funding of £2 million. Nick Dickson is the project manager and it will include many citizen science projects, particularly focused on freshwater ecology. It will run until 2025.

10. Date of next meeting

22nd April 2020 at 2.00 pm

Venue: SWT Ashbocking