

Meeting:	Ecology Working Group
Date:	24 th July 2024 9:00-11:00
Location:	MS Teams
Chair:	James Meyer (ESC)
Attendees:	James Meyer (ESC), Steve Mannings (SZC), Alan Lewis (SZC-AECOM), Nick Stayt (SZC-AECOM), Andrew Murray-Wood (SCC), Ayden Hassan (Environment Agency), Sean Mahoney (Natural England), Adam Rowlands (RSPB), Chris Strachan (EA), Matt Simpson (SZC-RHDHV), Bethany Rance (ESC), David White (Natural England), Patrick Robinson (Natural England), Will Salmon (SZC-RHDHV)
Apologies:	Ben McFarland (SWT)

Meeting Notes:**PROJECT UPDATES**

- SMan provided an update on the construction master plan and progress on site. The key updates raised included:
 - Woodland clearance nearly complete, with remaining tree removal scheduled for later in the year.
 - New access road from Lovers Lane is under construction.
 - Preliminary drainage and minor earthworks are in progress, poised for the start of main civil works.
 - Archaeological work and accommodation area development continue in the Ancillary Construction Area (“ACA”).
- SMan provides overview of key construction activities – Main Development Site (“MDS”):
 - Site clearance, temporary road construction, and initial earthworks/drainage ongoing.
 - Geotechnical trials completed, with more planned for the year-end and next year.
 - Water sourcing activities (utilising existing abstractions) are ongoing.
 - Benhall Fen Meadow works to be completed this year.
 - Main cut and fill earthworks for Temporary Construction Area (“TCA”) platform starting in Autumn; major earthworks for the nuclear platform likely to commence in 1-2 years.
 - Sheet pile barrier walls construction and Sizewell Marshes Site of Special Scientific Interest (“SSSI”) crossing works to begin upon discharge of requirement by ESC.
 - Temporary sea defence work to start in autumn, with coast path diversions in progress
- AR inquired about the construction method for sheet piling and whether the methods would be made available to the EWG so mitigation could agreed
 - AL confirmed that these issues were considered in the DCO application within the Environmental Statement and the Shadow Habitats Regulations assessment process.
 - JM stated that there is a need to make sure it is no worse than that previously assessed.
 - SM identified that it may not be possible to use ‘quieter methods’ across the required activities but investigations are ongoing.

Action - SMan to provide a summary of the details on the piling construction method for the sea defence works

MARSH HARRIER BASELINE

- AL provided a high level overview of the 11 years of Marsh Harrier surveys and outlined the objectives of the surveys.
- AL discussed the survey methods, outlining View Points and High Visibility Areas utilised during each survey.
- AL presented data showing consistent high levels of foraging activity across Minsmere South Levels and Sizewell Marshes and variable activity in remainder of SSSI.

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- AL noted that four juvenile marsh harrier have fledged from nest in SSSI Protected Corridor in Main Construction Area ("MCA").
- Key points included the dominance of MCA Resident pair in foraging activity, potentially obscuring TCA barrier effects. Distinguishing Minsmere Harriers from others is challenging, so data will be recorded as 'Harrier Foraging'.
- Territorial behaviour of nesting harriers on-site may naturally limit foraging by Minsmere Harriers creating natural barrier effects, which complicates the assessment of barrier effects moving forwards. AL seeks advice from group on demonstrating if there is a potential natural barrier effect from the nesting harriers.
- BM suggests not to confuse breeding territorial behaviour with wider foraging. He rather suspects the Minsmere harriers continue to forage within the SSSI, despite the nest. This is evidence of functional linkage, not a barrier effect. If DNA was used, they'd be very closely related, for example.

Action – AR to share guidance on identifying individual marsh harriers

Action – AR to contemplate how to best demonstrate the potential barrier effect of the breeding pair of Marsh Harriers within the SSSI protected corridor

- AR suggests identifying Sizewell Marsh birds by plumage and territorial behaviours without satellite tracking.

Action - AL to consider categorisation strategies for future observations of Sizewell Marsh Harriers. MS will discuss it with SES (who are undertaking the surveys) for their perspective

- CS noted that observing Harrier interactions could indicate if there is a natural barrier. AR added that the resident pair likely only defend their nest area.
- AL questioned if the key metric should be the Minsmere population and fledging totals, which AR could contribute data to.
- AL stated that prey abundance surveys are in progress to evaluate the effectiveness of marsh harrier compensation areas. AR is interested in comparing current foraging activity to pre-compensation baseline data.

TERRESTRIAL ECOLOGY MONITORING AND MITIGATION PLAN ("TEMMP") UPDATE

- NS summarised the status of individual survey Method Statements, with Bat Activity to be issued and Bat Light and Bat Noise to be reissued soon for information. Updates for Fish and Terrestrial Invertebrates will follow later at an appropriate time ahead of the surveys commencing.
- A draft TEMMP will be shared for comments once method statements are finalised, featuring separate sections for the MDS and associated development ("AD") sites and a new section on reporting timescales to provide further clarity on this. Once approved by the EWG the TEMMP would be submitted to ESC for approval under DCO requirement 4.
- Version control will be provided detail revisions applied to method statements post working group sign-off, with changes recorded in minutes rather than re-submitting to ESC for every minor update. The intention is to distribute the final method statements for comments as soon as they are completed.

Action - JM requests a version control statement for the TEMMP to track changes between versions, suggesting a revision table is included behind the cover page. SZC to include this in the draft to be issued for comment.

- JM inquiries about more effective report sharing, proposing public-facing agreed method statements on the ESC SZC portal and continued email sharing for draft comments.

Action - SMan / SZC to consider alternative approaches to sharing data with the EWG

FEN MEADOW TURVES

- AL stated that a Technical Note was sent out in May 2024 to assess suitability of Fen Meadow vegetation for turf translocation and to aid the definition of the translocation process. Surveys found that there was no fen meadow left in areas of permanent land-take and turves are not suitable for translocation as they have no soil structure.
- The technical note identified further surveys were to be undertaken in June 2024. It was noted that an interim report covering area of permanent land take will be released in August 2024, and full report will be issued in Autumn 2024. The aim of the survey is to determine whether issues regarding high levels of water are localised or site-wide.
- PR asked whether SZC are considering doing restoration works to recreated M22 habitats (fen meadow) within areas where it has naturally succeeded. SMan indicated that the matter of restoration is under the jurisdiction EDF Energy Nuclear Generation Limited (SZB) who SZC are in discussion with. SMan highlighted that there is a shared interest in improving conditions of wider SSSI but managing the water levels is beyond the control of SZB and SZC. The aim of commissioning survey is to better manage site and restore water balance, and findings will inform collective actions to maintain site in favourable conditions. Despite compensation works for loss of Fen Meadow, SZC are still proceeding with no change to commitments outlined within the Fen Meadow Plan.
- BM comments that the commitment to delivering M22 at the compensation sites is important, otherwise there is a net loss of M22 over time, given the permanent footprint historically had M22. BM suggests that in order to try to restore M22 within the remaining SSSI, there is a need for several restorative cut and collect hay cuts (as well as aftermath grazing), referring back to his point above re. poorer quality surface water. This could help reduce excess nutrients.
- PR questions whether works can be done on the site to push it back towards something more usable for transplantation. SMan responds that excessive water level limits actions, but plans are underway to manage water levels and reverse trends (based on NVC survey and discussions with ENGL and Natural England), including sourcing green hay.
- PR questions if there has been failure in ditch system, and SMan clarified that high water levels within the ditch network have always been high. A discussion with Water Management Working Group will be scheduled to address this issue, and how to best manage sites and maintain habitats.
- BM comments that the high-water levels, if they had been caused by high groundwater of high quality, would unlikely have had such a detrimental effect. The high-water level effect has undoubtedly been compounded by poor quality surface water. Consequently, any remediation needs to consider not only levels but also how to ensure the balance between ground water and surface water remains optimal.
- CS inquired about alternative methods to create fen meadow rather than turf translocation, such as using propagules and seeds. SMan explained that they prefer to use green hay as M22 seedbank is fragile, but will consider this suggestion as part of broader plan to reverse trends in Sizewell Marshes SSSI, especially for areas not submerged for extended periods.

BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

- SMan states that BNG for project is 19%, which is not legally required but demonstrates local wildlife benefits. Much of this gain has been realised through investments in land restoration. A summary note will be shared for audit of delivery which will outline work in progress status.
- SMan highlights that the Estate Wide Management Plan under DCO is overarching mechanism to delivering landscape restorations within the EDF Sizewell Estate.

- SMan states that potential initiative to improve 19% figure would be relation to ecological contributions of projects being funded by Natural Environment Improvement Fund.
- JM suggests careful consideration of how these funded projects could affect the overall BNG, especially since they occur outside the Sizewell estate.
- AL proposes adding a third category to BNG for off-site projects delivered through other types of mechanisms.
- SMan called for a collective discussion on the optimal use of the Natural Environment Improvement Fund to engage community groups and landowners effectively, ensuring the right forum for these conversations.
- AR notes that BNG is part of a broader nature recovery strategy being developed by SCC and the EWG should also consider other funds to help achieve 30% of all land well managed for nature by 2030.
- BM question the value of the NEIF fund projects adding to BNG. Not only would this limit the scope and range of the projects within the NEIF, it would also create a huge amount of project complexity for those that want to apply. BNG delivery is not straight forward and likely to have numerous obligations. It's far more important that the focus is on 30:30 and the LNRS, otherwise the efficiency of the NEIF would be significantly lower.
- BM states that there is some mention of trying to help organise/corral/influence applications to the NEIF. He would strongly suggest the EWG and EDF leave this to the formal decision panel for the fund and that any sort of corraling is done via Natalie Singleton and her role within the Heritage Landscape partnership. This would be far more transparent from a public point of view.

UPCOMING MEETING AND STRUCTURE

- EWG Tasks: NS outlines five tasks for the EWG as detailed in the Terms of Reference, including biannual reporting to the Environment Review Group ("**ERG**") on European Sites Contingency Fund expenditures, effectiveness of ecological mitigation and monitoring measures, and providing reports to Natural England's licensing team.
- Meeting Management: more frequent subgroup meetings with relevant members and landowners are proposed. Financial reporting will be handled by SZC's centralized team, with the ERG focusing on fund allocation approval. A separate workstream to be added for these discussions and MMPs.
- Survey Reports: NS suggests incorporating survey report discussions into meetings, similar to the Marsh Harrier presentation from this meeting.

Action – Team to consider the usefulness of survey updates and briefings in meetings

- NS proposes using the suggested survey briefings to document EWG recommended actions for ERG Approval in meeting minutes, potentially leading to more frequent meetings. NS also proposes separating work streams for MMPs and TEMMP-related discussions, with dedicated sections in meetings covering ERG reporting on effectiveness of measures, which will be recorded in minutes. ERG could then review minutes and request attendance of EWG members in meetings to explain recommendations in detail (as required).
- NS indicated that Task 3 (Fen Meadow quantum) and Task 5 (Natural England reporting) require less frequent, and standalone meetings may be arranged to discuss.

Action - Natural England to reflect on what information they would like to receive as part of no-licensable monitoring reporting

- SMan clarifies that while Natural England does not need to be directly involved in licensing discussions, they should be informed about non-licensing monitoring and mitigation activities. This update has been incorporated into the TEMMP revision.
- NS presented a draft timeline for future meetings, aligned with survey report releases.
- A new centralised SZC team has been established to handle meeting invitations.

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MATTERS ARISING

- AR emphasizes the importance of securing meeting dates in advance and clarifying roles for stakeholders.

Action - NS and SMan to create document outlining the MMP group's composition, stakeholder roles, and functions, to be issued and uploaded to ESC Governance group website

- AR requested updates on the details related to the works for the SSSI crossing. SMan stated that details are to be discharged under DCO requirement 20 and 21 and submission to be made in coming weeks, and reflects the detailed design.
- AR inquired about the progress of Natterjack toad mitigation. SMan clarified that the previously mentioned pond is no longer considered as part of the licence but remains a commitment, requiring a planning application. SZC intend to submit the application in Autumn 2024. The long-term goal is to integrate the habitat in Retsoms Field with Minsmere.
- BM comments that the amended plans might be okay but they need to be run past ARC. Currently there are two different opinions from ARC and these need to be reconciled. Jim Foster at ARC needs to be contacted and the plans run past him, so as to be sure the amended approach is the correct one.

Action – Contact Jim Foster at ARC to ensure amended Natterjack Plan is correct version

- AR discusses water discharge permits under review by the Environment Agency and the need for coordination between working groups. SMan mentions the Water Management Working Group's dashboard report and the upcoming Water Level Management Group meeting to discuss drainage and ditch maintenance.
- AR suggested having oversight of the deer management group and its ecological impact.
- AR raised the need to ensure marsh harrier breeding records at Wild Aldhurst are reported nationally.

Actions raised during the meeting:

Date Raised	Ref.	Description	Lead	Date Due
24/07/2024		SMan to provide details on the pilling construction method for the sea defences	Sizewell C Limited	10/2024
24/07/2024		AR to contemplate how to best demonstrate potential natural barrier effect of Marsh Harriers	RSPB	10/2024
24/07/2024		AL to consider categorisation strategies for future observations of Sizewell Marsh Harriers. MS will discuss it with SES for their perspective	Sizewell C Limited	10/2024
24/07/2024		Creation of version control statement for the TEMMP to track changes between versions, suggesting a revision table behind the cover page	Sizewell C Limited	10/2024
24/07/2024		SMan to consider alternative approaches to sharing data to make it more accessible to group, balancing data security and transparency	Sizewell C Limited	10/2024

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Date Raised	Ref.	Description	Lead	Date Due
24/07/2024		Team to consider the usefulness of survey updates and briefings in meetings	All members of EWG	10/2024
24/07/2024		Natural England to reflect on what information they would like to receive as part of no-licensable monitoring reporting	Natural England	10/2024
24/07/2024		NS and SMan to create a document outlining the MMP group's composition, stakeholder roles, and functions, to be issued and uploaded to the ESC Governance group website	Sizewell C Limited	10/2024
24/07/2024		Jim Foster at ARC needs to be contacted and the Natterjack plans run past him, so as to be sure the amended approach is the correct one	Sizewell C Limited	10/2024

Author: Caitlin Murphy (SZC)