

BEE HEALTH ADVISORY FORUM (Bhaf)
43rd MEETING – Thursday, 16th March 2023
10:30 – 13:00

Attendance

Belinda Phillipson (BP) - Chair	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) – Bee Health Policy (BHP)
Louise Mount (LM)	
Shaun Cook (SC)	
Kathleen Carroll (KC)	Welsh Government – Bee Health Policy
Rebekah Clarkson (RC) - minutes	National Bee Unit (NBU) – Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA)
Julian Parker (JP)	
Margaret Gill (MG)	
Jon Haycock (JH)	Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)
Rob Nickless (RN)	Bee Farmers' Association (BFA)
Wally Shaw (WS)	Welsh Beekeepers' Association (WBKA)
John Bowles (JB)	
Anne Rowberry (AR)	British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA)
Jane Medwell (JM)	
Martin Smith (MS)	Bee Disease Insurance (BDI)
Norman Carreck (NC)	Science Advisor – Sussex University
Giles Budge (GB)	Science Advisor – Newcastle University
Kirsty Stainton (KS)	Science Advisor – Independent
Adam Leitch (AL)	National Diploma in Beekeeping (NDB)
Ben Jones (BJ)	Fera Science Ltd.
Chris Hartfield (CH)	National Farmers' Union (NFU)
Tim Andrews	Defra – National Pollinator Strategy
Claire Gill	Scottish Government.
Alison Knox	
Tom Williamson (TW)	DAERA, Northern Ireland Executive

Apologies received from:

Nigel Semmence	Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA)
John Heard	Bee Farmers' Association (BFA)

1 Welcome and introductions

The online meeting began at 10:30.

BP welcomed Lynfa Davies (LD) from Menter a busnes and Maggie Gill (MG) the NBU Regional Bee Inspector for Wales who were both giving presentations.

Minutes from the previous meeting had been agreed over email and would be uploaded onto BeeBase in due course.

Review of outstanding Actions:

Meeting Number	Action	Update	Status
40-1	CH to update the 'Farming for bees' leaflet with the feedback received and bring back to the Forum. CH provisionally agreed to	This action has been delayed. An update is due at the next BHAF meeting in June.	Ongoing

	the deadline of March 2023.		
40-2	BBKA/WBKA to ask associations for mentoring experiences and send case studies by the end of September. LM is expecting to receive case studies shortly. LM will provide an update to the Forum in March.	LM has received a sufficient number of case studies from BBKA and WBKA. This action was closed during the meeting.	Closed
41-2	RC to send out a bespoke table of actions for each Forum member which they can then update ready for review at the next meeting.	RC is trialling a sharing folder open to all attendees. This will hold actions that can be filtered by owners and provides fields to update them.	Ongoing
41-6	RC to agree a convenient date in February for the science meeting. The date has yet to be agreed. RC to send out further dates in order to reach agreement	The Science meeting was held on the 15 th of Feb. There is an aspiration to do a re-run for those that could not attend.	Closed
42-1	RC to confirm work-based domain emails to set up a BHAF sharing area by 22 nd Dec 2022	RC had confirmed these emails prior to the meeting.	Closed
42-2	RC to contact external speakers for the 2023 Science meeting.	Several external speakers were contacted. Marla Spivak from the University of Minnesota agreed to provide a presentation on bee breeding. Due to a conflicting commitment this was delivered as a pre-recorded presentation, which was received very positively	Closed
42-3	BBKA/WBKA to request Associations update their contact points	BBKA and WBKA have both reached out to their associations to request the contact points are kept up to date.	Closed

42-4	RC to send out doodle polls to confirm the date of the next BHAF meeting to be held in 2023.	The meeting date was confirmed by email.	Closed
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2 Healthy Bees Plan 2030 Implementation Update

RC was in the process of setting up a SharePoint folder which all members of the forum could access. She asked the Forum if they had received an automatic email which confirmed access to the folder, as no-one confirmed they had received one RC offered to manually send the links to the attendees.

RC explained that she was finalising a spreadsheet document where members can choose their organisation or role and update the actions assigned to them. The document will allow individuals to use pre-filled dropdown menus and add short text updates for actions. Forum members will be invited to update their actions on the document once it is ready. These updates can be reviewed in the June Forum meeting.

RC informed the attendees that she is currently working on a grant scheme to fund online beekeeping courses. More information will be shared as soon as it is available.

Action 1: RC to send links to the SharePoint folder allowing forum members to update their progress on actions.

3 Online Training for Beekeepers

LD shared a presentation on the newly developed online training modules for intermediate beekeepers which is branded the 'Healthy bees academy'. These will be available bilingually in English and Welsh. There will be four modules which cover:

- Varroa control through integrated pest management
- diseases, disorders and pests
- buying and sourcing bees
- self-sufficiency through raising queens.

The modules will be live throughout the life of the Healthy Bees Plan 2030. The topics align with some BBKA modules and could also be used as revision for these.

The courses are aimed at intermediate beekeepers with 3-5 hive years' experience . Although some beekeepers with a high number of hives may be eligible within 12 months of starting beekeeping.

LD explained how the registration system is designed for every interaction to be a positive experience, it is hoped that those that aren't yet eligible may return in a few years' time. People who apply who are not eligible will be signposted to other courses such as the BBKA basic assessment and other introductory courses run by associations.

LD thanked BBKA and WBKA for their support in scheduling talks at events including the BBKA Spring Conference and the National Honey Show. She also thanked BeeCraft for raising awareness in their magazine. LD had also produced a flyer and press release to promote the courses.

LD covered the soft validation questions to gauge eligibility in the registration process. This will include: Postcode (To ensure only those from England and Wales can use it), BBKA/WBKA basic assessment completed or not, and questions to gauge level of experience. The Forum was asked if there was any other data it would be useful to capture. MS and AR said it would be useful to know if applicants were linked to a beekeeping organisation and registered on BeeBase.

LD agreed that this was a good point and agreed to incorporate this.

MS offered to share the code for a map of local associations in England and Wales. The candidates could be directed towards this if they did not belong to a beekeeping association, as it would show the closest one to them. LD thanked MS and they agreed to discuss this outside of the meeting. AL asked if it was possible to pass data onto BeeBase if the individuals were not yet registered.

LD acknowledged this point and agreed to come back to it when she discussed the feedback section of the course.

A range of podcasts have been recorded to support each of the four modules which people can listen to as part of the course. They are designed to help showcase different perspectives to particular issues.

MS: Was surprised that one of the podcasts included a discussion with an academic who had previously promoted non-treatment of Varroa in specific circumstances. LD explained that the podcasts had been reviewed to ensure they gave a balanced views so beekeepers could make informed choices. JP commented that the podcasts will add some colour and light to the topics. JB asked if more podcasts are planned in the future and LD said this is funding dependent. The course is scheduled to be launched this March. The platform is currently being updated to allow for long-term user access.

LD is currently designing the feedback form for the courses and asked the Forum to consider any feedback they felt would be valuable.

AL asked if any opportunities for further education are offered at the end of the course? LD explained that individuals would be signposted to other courses run by BBKA/WBKA. AL also highlighted the importance of linking to BeeBase which he believes is a huge resource for UK Beekeepers. LD confirmed the course includes links to BeeBase information when discussing specific topics. BP said how important it is to include a range of information sources so candidates can cross reference information.

AR enquired about updating information on the course after the 2-year contract period. AR would like to ensure that there is provision in the budget. BP and CR confirmed they are conscious of keeping information sources up to date, this will be reviewed in the future.

After answering questions, LD thanked attendees and left the meeting.

4 Small Hive Beetle in USA Maggie Gill

MG, the Regional Bee Inspector for Wales, gave an update on her research trip to the USA.

MG is working towards a PhD at Keele. She received significant social media interest in a poster she created '[Detection of honey bee disease/exotic pests in volatile profiles](#)', one of the organisations that approached her was the US army. They were interested in using bees

to detect use of chemical weapons. They invited her to work on a project with them on a USDA farm in the US.

During the first day with the bees, MG saw Small Hive Beetle (SHB) and was reassured to discover they were not as quick or difficult to spot as she'd expected. MG was confident that a bee inspector would spot SHB if present during a hive inspection.

MG also noted that US beekeepers used a couple of cheap methods to monitor and control SHB such as dish cloths to physically trap SHB and weed membranes with folded up edges to stop pupating larvae from travelling into the soil. In the sentinel apiaries in the UK plastic correx and oil traps are used. Beekeepers MG encountered in the US did not consider SHB to be a major issue as long as colonies were strong, they would only use chemical control when colonies were badly infested. On the other hand, Varroa was still considered very damaging.

MG got the opportunity to attend a presentation from a number of US beekeeping stakeholders and saw lots of useful collaborative work: -

['MiteCheck app'](#) is a citizens science project which collects mite infestation data. If mites are above the threshold levels the app directs beekeepers to the ['Varroa Decision Tool'](#). The app helps beekeepers compare appropriate veterinary medicines.

During winter MG has received many calls from beekeepers asking why they lost colonies. MG reflected how colonies die when they are too small to survive the winter and believes (anecdotally) 90% of the time it is because the colony is facing pressure from Varroa.

MG concluded the trip to the US was beneficial and helped her understand more about the threat of SHB. Some of the Varroa tools could also benefit UK beekeepers.

The trip made MG question the risk of *Tropilaelaps* which could potentially be much greater than SHB. After conversations with BDI, who agreed to fund a project with *Tropilaelaps*. A trip to Thailand was planned to look at specimens in the field. This was supported by the NBU, Fera Science and BDI. Victoria Tomkies from Fera Science attended, alongside several NBU inspectors. One of the outcomes from this trip in February was to improve and update *Tropilaelaps* standard operating procedures for exotic pest inspections.

JM thanked MG for a fascinating talk. She was interested in working together on citizen science projects like mite check. AR agreed that BBKA would be keen to participate in a citizen science project. MG invited Forum members who are interested to get in contact.

BJ agreed it was a fascinating talk and it was good to hear how beekeepers contributed by collecting samples. MG reflected that new approaches to manage Varroa effectively are good for the health of honeybees.

KC asked if the app was for other insects such as SHB? MG explained it wasn't as SHB was not seen as a great threat. The strong hives she saw in the US could tolerate SHB, however Varroa was a problem even for strong colonies. Although SHB does cause issues for queen rearing operations and for honey crops.

JH took the opportunity to remind attendees of the ['Product Information Database'](#). MG agreed that it was a useful tool but it's a couple of sub-menus into BeeBase and you've still got to work out which medicine is appropriate. BP suggested looking into a better location for the link to the VMD tool on BeeBase.

Action 2: BP to investigate with the NBU about moving the link to the VMD 'Product Information Database' to a more prominent area on BeeBase so that it is easier for people to find.

5 Trade

LM explained to the Forum how it is expected that the Target Operating Model (how border checks will be carried out in the future) will be published soon. BBKA, WBKA and BFA will be contacted, and meetings will be arranged as required.

NC asked how the Windsor agreement will impact imports and exports from NI. LM said for live animals it is expected there will be limited changes. Bee health policy have attended a series of workshops on the topic and are not expecting a great deal of change.

AR asked if there will be any changes regarding the way honey is regulated such as new export honey legislation? LM confirmed that this is a separate policy area, so wasn't able to comment on this.

RN explained about reported delays and issues with exports of honey. LM asked for further details so the matter could be looked into.

Action 3: BHP to enquire about any changes to imports and exports of honey following the TOM and Windsor agreement from the appropriate Defra policy teams.

6 AOB/comms/news

JH explained VMD were currently running a [consultation](#) reviewing VMD regulations.

The original legislation was set out in 2013, changes are now being proposed to review the fee structure and create more clarity regarding products. For example, the period of exclusivity for new medicines is proposed to change from 13 to 18 years. It is hoped this will encourage manufacturers to bring new products to market. EU legislation will still apply to NI. JH invited Forum members to review the consultation and welcomed their comments. JH also offered to give a short presentation on how new medicines come to market.

BJ asked if VMD foresee people working to a different regulatory process than the EU and will there be an appetite to bring medicines to the UK? JH confirmed the new EU regulations were produced with the UK's involvement. Dichotomous systems will create unavoidable additional costs.

RN reflected that bee farmers are looking at a reducing amount of veterinary medicines available to them. He believed the main reason for this was how expensive it was for manufacturers to bring new products to the UK market. This could lead to increased resistance, alongside higher costs for medicines due to less competition. RN asked if there was anything that could be done to help manufacturers register new products more cost effectively?

JH explained how VMD have allowed shortcuts for the approval process where possible, but the safety and efficacy must still be investigated thoroughly for a product to be labelled and marketed as a veterinary medicine.

7 Forward Look:

Future meetings: RC said that we were eager to have a face-to-face meeting. RN had suggested meeting out of season at a mutually convenient event. The Forum agreed the National Honey Show 26th to 28th October 2023 at Sandown Park would be convenient.

Action 4: RC to send out a doodle poll of times between 26th to 28th October 2023, to agree a slot for the next BHAF.

UN World Bee Day 20th May. NBU are planning a bee health science social media post related to the June gap and the need to feed bees. The post will be shared with the forum.

Bees needs week 10 to 16th of July. RC described how there is a plan to produce a 'prekeeping quiz' asking questions about honey bees during bees needs week. The quiz will provide answers and signpost people to resources about bees. The quiz will fulfil action 23 in the implementation plan 'develop a pre-keeping product'.

Future Agenda items: RC and BP explained how we are keen to have more active input from the Forum and we would like members to propose agenda items that they or their members would like us to discuss.

KC requested that during the October meeting the forum schedule a short agenda item on the Asian hornet season to date.

JH offered to give a more detailed talk on the VMD process of bringing a product to market.

Action 5: RC to request agenda items from the Forum in April

Meeting ended at 12:15.

Proposed Forum meeting dates:

No	Dates/info	Location
44	Thursday 22 nd June 2023 10:30 - 13:00	Virtual - MS Teams
45	New arrangements to be made between Wednesday 25 th October- Friday 27 th October. [Meeting previously arranged for Thursday 21 st September 2023 10:30 - 13:00.]	Sandown Park
46	Thursday 7 th December 2023 10:30 - 13:00	Virtual - MS Teams
	Wednesday 14 th February 2024 13:30- 16:00	Virtual - MS Teams