

**BEE HEALTH ADVISORY FORUM (Bhaf)**  
**38th MEETING – Thursday, 9<sup>th</sup> December 2021**  
**MS Teams**  
**10:30 – 13:00**

Attendance:

Belinda Phillipson (BP) - Chair	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) – Bee Health Policy (BHP)
Frank Petherbridge (FP)	
Louise Mount (LM)	
Rebekah Clarkson (RC) - minutes	National Bee Unit (NBU) – Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA)
Julian Parker (JP)	
Cristina Ruiz Martin (CRM)	
Margaret Gill	
Kathleen Carroll (KC)	Welsh Government – Bee Health Policy
Ben Jones (BJ)	Fera Science Ltd.
Alison Knox	Scottish Government
Wally Shaw (WS)	Welsh Beekeepers' Association (WBKA)
Anne Rowberry (AR)	British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA)
Norman Carreck (NC)	Sussex University
Rob Nickless	Bee Farmers' Association (BFA)
Adam Leitch (AL)	National Diploma in Beekeeping (NDB)
Tom Williamson (TW)	DAERA, Northern Ireland Executive
Tahira Kauser (TK)	Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)
Chris Hartfield (CH)	National Farmers' Union (NFU)

Apologies received from:

Maureen Wakefield (MW)	Fera Science Ltd.
Nigel Semmence (NS)	National Bee Unit (NBU)
Margaret Ginman (MG)	Bee Farmers' Association (BFA)
John Bowles (JB)	Welsh Beekeepers' Association (WBKA)
Martin Smith (MS)	Bee Disease Insurance (BDI)
Luis Molero	Scottish Government
Ian Fenn	Defra – National Pollinator Strategy

**1. Welcome and introductions**

The Chair welcomed everyone. Minutes of 37<sup>th</sup> meeting had been published in November following email agreement.

Only 37-4 from the previous meeting was outstanding and this was to be covered in agenda item 3.

37 -1 closed - the science Adviser Expression of Interest is live on BeeBase until 16<sup>th</sup> December.

37 -2 complete - send comments on the Science Adviser Expression September

37 -3 complete. BP thanked everyone who had contributed to the list of BHAF science projects

37 -4 to be completed during agenda item 3 - Draft science meeting agenda for December's BHAF

## **2. Forum Business: Terms of Reference and Science Adviser Expression of Interest**

RC updated the Forum that the Terms of Reference (ToR) were now visible on BeeBase. 16 Forum members raised no further comments about the Terms of Reference in an MS Poll.

NC asked for confirmation regarding the organisations involved, that BBVA, NDB and the VMD were not on the circulated version.

RC clarified that the agreed ToR required that full members of the Forum are expected to contribute to at least one action under the Healthy Bees Plan 2030's Implementation Plan. The British Bee Veterinary Association had not formally agreed to contribute an action. Consequently, a letter had been sent to confirm that BBVA will no longer join the forum as a full member.

Action 38.1 RC to check Forum members listed in the published ToR (31/12/2021)

The BBKA were disappointed that the BBVA is no longer involved. AR reflected that they have a different perspective and their presence on the Forum is useful.

RC confirmed that the BBVA may be invited to contribute on topics as the BHAF agreed.

NC echoed the BBKA's views. The UK is unusual, in most other countries, Bee health is in the hands of vets and the BBVA is in touch with the European VA and its up-to-date information. Although BBVA may not currently be an active stakeholder NC expressed his view that their input will become increasingly important.

RC thanked the Forum for circulating the details of the expression of interest of Bee Health Advisory Forum Science Advisor role, which is open until Friday 17th December at 17:00. A number of candidates have already submitted an expression of interest.

## **3 BHAF Science Meeting Agenda**

KC outlined how one of the implementation plan actions was to hold an annual BHAF science meeting. The first of these meetings is to be held on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2022.

KC thanked the Forum for providing details of the science projects they are involved in prior to the meeting which had been organised into themes and circulated prior to the meeting

Themes included:

- disease,
- pests - e.g., *Varroa*,
- chemicals,
- pollinator,
- non-native species - small hive beetle and Asian hornet and
- forage.

The SHB project theme had been changed from the circulated document to non-native species rather than pest for the purpose of voting. Two projects, a BBKA case study and Defra's social science study were not included in the votes because the title had not been agreed with the supervisor and a presentation has already been given respectively. The Forum discussed how the phase of the project is an important aspect to consider when inviting researchers to speak as it may not be appropriate to ask for presentations early in research.

Six Forum members voted to have a disease themed meeting and to discuss two projects in detail at the first science meeting (number in brackets indicate the number of votes):-

1. EurBeST (European honey Bee breeding and Selection Team) (2)
2. Determining factors that influence honey bee susceptibility to DWV (2)

A reserve project was voted for after a short comfort break (to be requested if no one is available to present on the projects initially voted for).

3. Transmission routes and triggers of EFB with the ultimate aim of providing a better understanding and improved control over this disease. u prepared slides to explain how we hope to organise the science meeting. [BDI]

CH POSHBee are publishing work from this project all the time- 2 papers this month on the impact of fungicide co-formulants and the impact of glyphosate on bumblebees.

WS suggested that the themes could have been organised in a different way e.g. Deformed wing virus and *Varroa* go hand in hand with Professor Stephen Martin's work (University of Salford) which shows how resistance to Deformed wing virus may arise.

AL reflected how all of the projects look interesting so it is hard to choose. None leap out, could we work through over a number of meetings?

The list clearly shows the wide variety of work that is going on.

BP this is the first major attempt at having a major science focus for an entire meeting. Alternatively the agenda could cover several topics to a lesser extent. We can review after the meeting in February.

NC Many years ago the BBKA had a list of science projects which was useful but it became a laborious task to keep it updated. AR: it would be useful, illuminating even, to understand the full BBKA/ association investment into research.

There was a general view expressed that putting this information together and updating it on an annual basis would be useful.

Action 38.2 RC to arrange agreed presentations for the science meeting.

#### **4 Annual NBU update**

JP provided the Forum with a National Bee Unit 2021 update using PowerPoint this included:

- A recruitment update, a new National Bee Inspector, a number of senior Regional Bee Inspector retirements and regional recruitment across the UK.
- 2 years of DASH baseline inspections and audits done in 2021.
- Worked with VMD to complete residue tests.
- Despite covid restrictions, NBU supported or ran 45 events during the season.
- A high level of colonies were inspected but the rate of disease is not higher and the beekeepers who have disease had more disease.
- Imports of packages and colonies are no longer permitted. Queens mainly imported from Italy Malta, Greece, Denmark and Romania.  
<https://www.nationalbeeunit.com/public/BeeDiseases/importReport.cfm>
- NBU worked with BDI to do a whole apiary shook swarm project which will continue next year. We want to understand, does treating whole apiaries have any impact on reinfection rates? Does a whole apiary shook swarm impact on inspection time? BDI is honouring apiary claims for equipment as part of this project, which encourages BK engagement.
- Working to overhaul the public facing part of BeeBase which we hope will be complete by March 2022

- Inspectors now use an Asian Hornet track and trace app during contingencies. The web-based application saved 851 forms being completed during this year's outbreaks as these records are now captured by the App and are immediately visible on maps.
- 2 Asian Hornet outbreaks this year,
  - Ascot, Berkshire 6th October reported by a beekeeper. The weather was poor which limited visibility and few insects were flying. Nest found noon 11th October
  - Portsmouth, Hampshire, 29th October 2021 reported by a member of the public. Nest found the following day c.20m high.
  -

TK thanked JP for the positive feedback regarding the VMD's enforcement team.

MG joined the Forum for the first time to explain the new education project she was project managing. Winter working bee inspectors are developing new material (in English and Welsh) in new formats which we hope beekeepers will find more engaging and accessible. The project includes:

- Accessible presentations - narrated & subtitled PowerPoints.
- NBU Dedicated Social Media; Facebook, Twitter and Instagram posts to engage with today's beekeepers.
- Longer monthly YouTube videos (15 minutes) to provide more in-depth information.
- Bee disease web-based app. suitable for tablets and smartphones to assist beekeepers' diagnosis of hive issues.
- Healthy bees animation explaining what the NBU does for wider engagement.
- Queen rearing workbook to aid self-sufficiency
- Legal requirements of beekeeping.

AR: The BBKA is pleased to hear NBU is updating BeeBase. It would be good to ensure we collaborate to ensure we are saying the same thing e.g., can we download the YouTube videos?

MG agreed to share material and give embargoed updates to the Forum. RC suggested we could follow the same methodology on how we collaborate and plan Asian Hornet week.

AR said if we all do the same topics it can be quite repetitive and BBKA aim to provide complimentary information to NBU. BP agreed.

JP How do we reach the beekeepers that are not registered/ not members of association, how do we reach more people? We have up to now, not used social media, but people use social media to gather information and follow their interests. The NBU aim to provide timely accessible information that will support the wider beekeeping community e.g., with winter loss issues.

Forum members agreed we need to appeal to beekeepers in a timely and engaging manner and work together.

TW: Great to see this Maggie. We're particularly interested in sustainable beekeeping/your workbook on queen rearing. MG confirmed this would be available on BeeBase to print off.

WBKA- issues leaflets to BK's free. We would like to ensure that we have consistent messages.

Action 38.3 Share the draft schedule of planned engagements with the Forum.

## 5 AOB/comms/news

5.1 WS raised the matter of beekeepers ceasing treating colonies to control *Varroa*. In North West Wales there is group of beekeepers urging others to do this. There have been several rather evangelical articles in the Welsh Beekeeper and one in BeeCraft promoting this practice. BBKA News has recently also published a [Special Issue booklet](#) on the subject, where the matter is discussed in science-based terms and some advice on how to proceed is given. At the present time APHA seems to have adopted safety-first policy in its advice to beekeepers - recommending them to continue to treat. Up till now this has been responsible advice but has recently come under some criticism (in Wales at least). Looking to the future, I think a more open-minded and progressive approach will be required but will need to be accompanied by sound practical advice. On the basis of four years practical experience (of non-treatment), I would be happy to make some contribution to this aspect; such as under what conditions non-treatment is likely to succeed, avoidance of adverse effects on other beekeepers and the type of management protocols that need to be adopted.

JP NBU accept beekeepers manage their colonies in different ways. We only comment if bee health suffers. The question of *Varroa* treatment is interesting. Professor Stephen Martin from Salford University talked about his latest research to the NBU on *Varroa* and viruses in June this year. He summarised that he did not fully advocate non treatment, if you wish to avoid losses. If you do not treat, you have to accept less productive colonies and a level of colonies failing. JP offered to encourage inspectors to present an open view regarding different approaches.

BBKA's position is similar in that we are supportive of beekeepers' personal/regional decisions. Steve Martin's research on bees and their ability to adapt to *Varroa* is interesting.

Action 38.4: WS to share Welsh *Varroa* information with the Forum.

Action 38.5: JP to raise awareness of non-treatment with SBI's to ensure SBIs feel comfortable having informed discussions. BK's choose their style of beekeeping. (Start of season training in April 2022).

5.2.1 Hive count: 6,078 have completed the 2021 hive census in the first month, in the weeks following only a handful of additional BK's have updated their records. An update went out on 1st December. Please share reminders to update records with your members.

6 Meeting closed 13:00

### Future Forum meeting dates:

No	Dates/info	Location
	Science Meeting: Thursday 10th February 2022 10:00 - 12:30	Virtual - MS Teams
39	Thursday 3rd March 2022 10:00 - 13:00	Virtual - MS Teams
40	Thursday 30th June 2022 10:00 - 13:00	Virtual - MS Teams