

Bee Health Advisory Forum 34th Meeting Minutes
3rd December 2020, 10:30 – 13:00 (Zoom conference)

In attendance:

Belinda Phillipson (BP) - Chair	
Louise Mount (LM)	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) – Bee Health Policy
Frank Petherbridge (FP)	
Rebekah Clarkson (RC) - minutes	
Julian Parker (JP)	National Bee Unit (NBU) – Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA)
Sandra Gray (SG)	
Pete Davies (PD)	
Kathleen Carroll (KC)	
Maureen Wakefield (MW)	Wales Government – Bee Health Policy
Fiona Highet (FH)	Fera Science Ltd.
Luis Molero (LMol)	Scottish Government
Margaret Ginman (MG)	
Wally Shaw (WS)	Bee Farmers' Association (BFA)
John Bowles (JB)	Welsh Beekeepers' Association (WBKA)
Pam Hunter (PH)	
Anne Rowberry (AR)	British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA)
Norman Carreck (NC)	Sussex University and National Diploma in Beekeeping
John Hill (JH)	British Bee Veterinary Association (BBVA)
Tom Williamson (TW)	DAERA, Northern Ireland Executive
Tahira Kauser (TK)	Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)
Chris Hartfield (CH)	National Farmers' Union

Apologies received from:

Kevin Beattie (KB)	DEFRA bee health policy - on secondment.
Louisa Willows (LWs)	Defra – National Pollinator Strategy
Nigel Semmence (NS)	National Bee Unit (NBU) – Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA)
Adam Leitch (AL)	National Diploma in Beekeeping (NDB)

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed all to the 34th meeting. Congratulations were given to JP who was appointed as the permanent Head of NBU on the 1st December, following a Civil Service wide recruitment campaign.

Minutes to the September meeting were [published on BeeBase](#) in October.

2. Q2 Highlight Report 2020-21 (RC)

RC invited comments on the report which had been circulated prior to the meeting.

BBKA queried whether the reference to EU apiculture funding was still appropriate. LM clarified that funding is still not clear: the UK may be eligible, but this is dependent on trade negotiations.

MG asked about Bee Health Education contract procurement and RC confirmed this was an agenda item later in the meeting.

RC asked the Forum if anyone had any views about the format of the highlight report. Being at the start of the Healthy Bees Plan 2030 gave us an opportunity to review, revise and refresh previous processes.

Action: Forum to advise RC of any highlight report formats/ additions by 08/01/2021

3. End of Transition (LM)

LM updated the Forum on plans for the end of transition at the end of the year. Negotiations continue. There is a continued requirement for traders to provide health certificates. BeeBase will be kept up to date with the latest official guidance.

AR asked if there was a border point between Ireland and Northern Ireland for import.

TW clarified. There is free movement across Ireland, so no border checks on Irish borders. Legislation stipulates you are required to have a health certificate when trading across borders in Ireland.

JP confirmed NBU plan to do a direct mail shot to importers we know of who have imported/exported over the last three years as soon as guidance is clarified.

LMol asked for clarification of the import process regarding queen importation if the UK is trading as a third country. JP clarified, if the EU is classified as a third country from 01/01/2021, attendants and cages which accompany imported queens will need to be sent to the lab for analysis.

4. Asian Hornet Outbreak at Gosport Pete Davies 11:05

PD, Regional Manager for the NBU's Southern Region provided a presentation on this year's only reported Asian Hornet nest in GB, in Gosport. PD has been involved in the eradication of 6 nests previously.

PD described how the contingency was run; from the sighting sent from the app, the management of the sites including risk assessments to ensure everyone is safe. The presentation described setting up feed stations, so hornets can be followed to the nest, liaising with local people so that the neighbourhood, including the police and council, are aware of what is going on and are not alarmed.

Some of the nests from previous years had been found low down, in bushes or in the ground but this year's nest was in an apple tree in the front garden in a residential area. The need to follow the hornets and not be distracted by 'likely nesting sites' such as trees was evidenced by this year's response.

Sightings previously recorded in the Asian Hornet App (with not enough detail for NBU action) within a 5km radius are reviewed when there is a confirmed sighting.

Wick feeders are used to attract insects. Open feeders are used to track hornets as insects gather a 'full load' quickly and return more directly to the nest. Traps are only used to monitor the situation further afield or to ensure there are no further hornets following nest destruction.

Each contingency offers a new opportunity to refine the communications process. PD noted how clear public engagement is key to the success of contingencies, including leafletting neighbours. People need to be aware, informed and not alarmed.

APHA is currently developing a mapping app for inspectors to map Asian hornet sightings in-field which helps narrow down the location of the nest quickly.

MG: does the fact that there was only one Asian Hornet this year give any indication of pathways?

The Forum considered how AH was more likely to hitch a ride and, as channel crossings were reduced, this may have reduced AH's opportunities to arrive here. DNA analysis concluded hornets from the 2020 nest were not daughters from a previous UK incursion.

AR asked if NBU had the facility to use radio tracking and had we been working with Pete Kennedy. PD confirmed NBU last worked with Pete in Brockenhurst. PD explained how, to date, following hornets has led inspectors quickly to the nest location.

JP - radio tracking is still limited by the weight of the tagging device and you still need large hornets which makes its use in the UK limited (as hornets have generally been smaller).

PD explained that heavily wooded areas are particularly challenging and radio tracking may save time in that situation.

AR explained how AH Teams can feel disheartened by not being involved. How can AH teams be involved in the immediate area of the contingency? RC outlined the agreed process.

Comfort break 11:35

5. NBU update (JP)

Julian Parker gave an NBU update, which included:

- Commentary on the how the year's programme was adapted to respond to Covid
- A review of inspection numbers and the additional data cleansing on BeeBase
- A review of disease found this year, notably an increase of 33% in EFB
- An observation that antibiotic treatment was used for only 2 colonies and largely falling out of use.
- A review of bee imports
- Commentary on the year's honey residue sampling programme and a recent finding of Naphthalene in a late season sample, subject to further investigation. A note that a separately submitted sample as part of a WIIS investigation had found glyphosate above MRL in honey.

Looking ahead:

- Virtual Technical training being planned for 2021
- An explanation of newly formed Technical Advice Panels
- Plans to resume beekeeper education activities in 2021 with use of webinars.
- Resumption of DASH audits and baseline inspections in 2021
- No leavers at the end of 2020 – which means a strengthened start in the 2021 season
- All Standard Operating Procedures being reviewed ahead of 2021 season with a clear 2020 ISO audit following the annual review.

PH asked JP to elaborate on the contaminant testing. JP explained how the programme across the year targets a range of residues.

CH explained how there is continued anti-pesticide activism especially concerning the use of glyphosate. JP commented that glyphosate being found in honey is extremely rare usually requiring exceptional circumstances, such as drought and bees finding no other available water source. He further added that Natural England investigators are impartial and independent.

NC raised the issue of bias within published research papers and gave an example where unrealistic doses of pesticide had been used in a method.

6. Healthy Bees Plan Education Procurement

RC gave a short presentation on the procurement process. No education has been procured during the 2020-2021 financial year to date. Best case scenario timescales for the future procurement of Healthy Bees Plan Education contracts were provided:-

- 1) Specification Q4
- 2) Procurement Q1
- 3) Delivery Q2-4
- 4) Review Annual – the plan is to be refreshed approximately every 3 years.

The aim is to fund education as outlined in the Healthy Bees Plan 2030 but there is a process that needs to be followed to procure openly and fairly and ensure that taxpayers received value for money.

7. AOB/comms/news

7.1) BeeBase 'literature review' PD explained about the work he has been doing with winter-working Seasonal Bee Inspectors to review the current literature on BeeBase: nearly 70 documents. Some "leaflets" were actually quite substantial. The team is working to streamline the range available but is conscious that some of the literature is associated with the Healthy Bees Plan. PD offered to come back to the forum to discuss proposals.

7.2) Medicines used to manage ticks and fleas in dogs and cats could be a risk to bees - JH. The issue of fipronil in river water was raised at a previous Bee Health Advisory Forum. [Link to article in Vet Times.](#)

Action: Schedule medicine risks to bees as a future BHAF agenda item.

7.3) Hive Count FP explained that 7,500 beekeepers had so far updated their BeeBase data as part of the 2020 hive count, which would run until 31/12/20. This compared very favourably even with last year, in which a record number of beekeepers completed a return. Members were invited to update their information if they had not already done so. This annual exercise helps to provide some indication of UK colony numbers and will continue to happen in future although we have now left the EU.

Action: Forum members to remind their membership to respond to the hive count.

7.4) Future BDI attendance/membership at the BHAF. BP explained how BDI have previously written to enquire about if they could join the Forum. The discussion was delayed because of the HBP review, producing the new plan and now developing the implementation plan. The Forum was asked if they were content if the BDI are invited to the next BHAF meeting in March 2021. BDI are a constructive partner, sharing an interest in supporting efforts to drive down disease levels.

WS/JP/CP all endorsed the BDI joining the BHAF and felt it would be appropriate to have their input on the Forum. There was unanimous agreement that BDI should be invited to the Forum.

Action: Invite BDI formally to the next meeting

7.5) A Social Study to Support the Healthy Bees Plan 2030 AR asked for an update regarding the timescale of the review and if it was feeding into the new Healthy Bees Plan. BP explained how there had been delays with procurement; an announcement was expected within the next few days. The research would feed into future work, but in the short-term we would press on with developing contracts for next year.

AR explained how BBKA have found the timescales of this procurement frustrating. BP explained how the competition will be open for longer for future education contracts.

Meeting closed 13:10