

Date: 6th December 2017
Report: Surrey Hills AONB Unit Report
Written by: Surrey Hills AONB Unit

Purpose of Report

To update Members on the activities related to the Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan (2014 – 2019)

Summary

This report refers to activities of the Surrey Hills AONB Unit under the following Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan headings:

Partnership and Coordination
Planning
Landscape Conservation and Access
Enjoyment and Understanding

The report includes updates from the Working Groups and highlights activities related to celebrating the 60th anniversary of the AONB designation in 2018.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the activities on the AONB Unit.

Background papers: Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan 2014 - 2019

Attached:

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1. PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION

1.1 National Association for AONBs (NAAONB). The AONB Chairman and Director attended the National Association's Chairmen's Conference and AGM on 23rd November. The Minister, Lord Gardner, addressed the meeting and stayed for the presentations. He confirmed central Government's commitment to AONBs and that they should continue to have the highest level of protection. The theme was looking at the implications of Brexit and the opportunity to target future public support into farming and land management at National Parks and AONBs.

1.2 Regional AONBs and National Parks. The South Downs National Park hosted a meeting of the Lead Officers to discuss collaboration and share information. This included a site visit to the Knepp Estate in Sussex which is one of the large scale re-wilding projects that has introduced extensive grazing and reverting arable land to woodland through natural regeneration. The AONB team has also visited the Dorset AONB to share information on funding, marketing, the arts, health and well-being, developing the food and drink sector, and the monitoring, review and preparation of the AONB Management Plan.

1.3 AONB Management Plan. The AONB Unit will be arranging a meeting of the Officers Working Group to plan the review of the AONB Management Plan. A new Plan will need to be adopted by the local authorities and submitted to the Secretary of State in 2019. This will also be an opportunity to review the governance arrangements and the Strategic Business Plan.

1.4 Surrey University. The Vice Chancellor of Surrey University, Professor G Q Max Lu, and senior colleagues hosted a meeting to explore closer working with the Surrey Hills. One of the key proposals is to have a high level symposium or conference looking at the future of the AONB with academic research related to development, technology, climate change and health and well-being. This is potentially a collaboration with the Surrey Nature Partnership to develop ideas like natural capital and valuing ecosystem services. This could provide the basis for reviewing and updating the AONB Management Plan. There was also the offer of getting Phd students to monitor and evaluate projects like Into the Wild, citizen science and the Surrey Unearthed arts programme.

1.5 Surrey Hills Trademark. The Surrey Hills trademark licence for the use of the trademark has been extended for a further 3 years to the Society and Enterprises. The Surrey Hills Communications Group provides scrutiny and oversight to ensure its consistent and coherent use in line with the licence.

1.6 60th Anniversary in 2018. The Surrey Hills Communications Group is coordinating activity. The key message is to celebrate that the beautiful landscapes of the Surrey Hills have been conserved and enhanced over the past 60 years. A small budget has been identified in 2017/18 to help develop ideas and funding bids coordinated through the Group. Projects currently under development include:

- Anniversary booklet, focusing on the history of the designation led by the Surrey Hills Society, which has received HLF funding
- Six Anniversary prints of the Surrey Hills by local artist, Louise Dunckley. Prints will be auctioned & sold to raise funds for the Surrey Hills Trust Fund.
- Travel Campaign. Posters and postcards will feature at railway and bus stations in the Surrey Hills area. Six itineraries are being created and will feature on the back of the postcards with further links to the website. An advert in Surrey Bus Timetables has already gone to print promoting the anniversary year.

- 60 reasons to visit the Surrey Hills, pictorial section on the website, pointing out the unusual and well known iconic sites in the Surrey Hills
- Civic Reception at Speakers House, Houses of Parliament, sponsored by Anne Milton MP
- Alderbrook event organised by the Surrey Hills Society.
- Surrey Life calendar and photographic exhibition at Denbies on 29 January
- Surrey Unearthed projects delivered by Surrey Hills Arts to help raise awareness of the anniversary.

Appendix 1 highlights some key dates that Members should be aware of.

2. PLANNING

2.1 CPRE Research. A new report has been published by CPRE under the title “Beauty Betrayed: how reckless housing development threatens England’s AONBs”. The report highlights the increase in major housing allocations in AONBs and the number of units approved. It documents how land approved for housing each year has increased 5 fold since 2012. Although the Surrey Hills was not featured in the study, we did receive substantial coverage in broadsheet media. CPRE’s recommendation to government is that additional resources need to be made available to AONB units to help champion the landscapes.

2.2 Waverley Local Plan. The Inspector, Jonathan Bore, has given the Council his initial conclusions following his holding of an Examination in Public (EIP) in June. His focus was entirely upon housing numbers and from his written questions to the Council and reports from some of those attending he seemingly was less interested in constraints, such as the AONB. This was possibly reflected by not inviting the Surrey Hills AONB Planning Adviser to attend the hearing.

The Council has accepted his conclusion that the number of homes should be increased from 519 in the draft plan to 590 a year of an increase from 9,861 to 11,210 dwellings in the period 2013-2032. The main reason was to share with Guildford the shortfall in the adopted Woking Local Plan of about 225 dwellings a year mainly because of its Green Belt constraint. The logic behind this seems questionable when it has meant Waverley proposing recently to modify the plan by including most the homes within its Green Belt and some also within the doubly constrained AONB that does not exist as a constraint in Woking. The result of the Council’s published modifications to the plan is for there now to be over 500 dwellings proposed to be allocated to green field sites in the AONB. Continued concern has been expressed on behalf the Board. The Council and those preparing neighbourhood Plans are currently working on a detailed assessment of those sites in Part 2 of the Local Plan expected to be submitted to the Secretary of State at the end of 2018.

2.3 Guildford Local Plan. The Guildford Local Plan is being submitted to the Planning Inspectorate this month for an EIP between April and July 2018. The Guildford Local Plan does not make any housing site allocations in the AONB save for an access to the substantial Blackwell Farm development site allocation at the bottom of the Hogs Back. The plan makes substantial provision for additional homes. The Council revised the wording of its AONB and AGLV policy as suggested in the Board’s submission.

2.4 Mole Valley Local Plan. The draft Mole Valley Local Plan is intended to be published in the latter half of 2018. A Core Strategy was adopted in 2009. The Council has

already concluded that it will be unable to accommodate its housing demand of about 3,000 dwellings by 2037 on brown field sites. Therefore it will be contemplating urban extensions and the expansion of one or more villages. The Board will need to check this would entail any adverse impacts upon the AONB.

2.5 Reigate and Banstead Local Plan. The Core Strategy was adopted as recently as 2014. The Council is currently preparing a Development Management Plan that would be more detailed than the core strategy with consultation in January/ February 2018 with adoption at the end of the year.

2.6 Tandridge Local Plan. The Council is proposing to meet a large part of its housing needs within a new garden village. The Council has dropped a suggestion one possible site for the new settlement would be in the AONB at Chaldon. The other alternatives are well beyond the AONB. The draft local plan is expected next year with an EIP and adoption in 2019.

2.7 Dunsfold Park. With regard to notable development control matters the Secretary of State's decision on an application he called in for a new settlement at Dunsfold is awaited following a public inquiry in the summer. Although located outside the AONB the main AONB concern is that traffic generated by the development would harm several AONB country lanes. Shortly before the inquiry, the Local Plan Inspector had already concluded that at least 2,600 dwellings should be provided in the new settlement as opposed to the 1,800 in the called in application.

2.8 Sturt Lane, Haslemere. An appeal has been allowed near Sturt Lane on the south side of Haslemere for 19 dwellings some of which would be within the AONB. A justification for allowing the appeal was that the Council itself had proposed housing on AONB sites in its emerging local plan. The danger of including housing sites within the AONB in the local plan was pointed out in the Board's representations on the emerging local plan.

2.9 Leith Hill Oil and Gas. This proposal for exploratory drilling for oil and gas has received national publicity. Surrey County Council has not approved the traffic management scheme which is subject of a planning condition because it is not satisfied that the traffic management plan is adequate in terms of addressing the impact on the narrow sunken lanes.

2.10 AONB boundary Review. There has been no update on the timetable for Natural England to undertake the review. Natural England has indicated that work will commence following the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB boundary review, which is expected to be completed in 2018.

3. LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT

3.1 North Downs – Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund (Chaired by Bert Broom). This farmer cluster covers the escarpment of the North Downs between Guildford and Dorking. The last meeting took place on 21st November at Juniper Hall Field Studies Council. It agreed the training objectives for 2018. The intention is to grow the group and the area over the 5 year period. At the last meeting Graham Wrigley of Chilworth Manor signed up and potentially so will Chris White of Denbies. Activity around the Group is increasing with the Butterfly Conservation Small Blue project undertaking extensive habitat creation work with volunteers and Surrey Wildlife recently launching its Hedgerow Heroes initiatives at Bert Broom's Sondes Place Farm.

3.2 Greenscapes – Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund. Working with Surrey Hills Enterprises and the consultants, Lantern, a bid has been submitted to Natural England to work with a cluster of landowners looking at woodland issues in an area of South West Surrey. This includes estates of Winterfold Forest, Wintershall, Birtley and the National Trust. A decision should be made by March

3.3 Wealden Heaths - Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund. In 2019, we are planning to develop a bid to Natural England for a further project to coordinate the management of extensive areas of European Protected heathland sites, which includes Thursley, Hankley, Tilford Woods, Frensham, Hindhead and the Devil's Punchbowl. It comprises areas of wet and dry heathland, valley bogs, broad-leaved and coniferous woodland, permanent grassland and open water.

3.4 Tillingbourne Tales HLF Project (Chaired by David Wright). This very successful project has now come to an end. At the last Steering Group meeting Dr Anne Sassin, Project Coordinator, gave a Power Point overview of what had been achieved by the project which had focused on the 7 villages along the Tillingbourne Valley. A series of railway posters has been produced in partnership with Great Western Railways. The posters link in with the 7 walk leaflets which were produced as part of the project and will appear at GWR stations from Gatwick to Reading. The next meeting of the Steering Group is being planned for January 2018.

3.5 Byways Working Group (Chaired by David Wright). The Group last met on 23rd October 2017. Mike Nash, SCC Partnership & Intelligence Officer, reported that sharing information on fly-tipping with the Districts and Boroughs is going well and that nearly all the Districts and Boroughs now have a Joint Enforcement Team. Mike confirmed that the PCC and SCC are going 50/50 on the purchase of SelectaDNA crystals which can be sprinkled on the ground in areas where trespass is taking place and which, with accompanying signage, have been found to be an excellent deterrent. Members of the Group reported that unfortunately Surrey Police's "In the Know" initiative which has replaced "Country Watch" is not effective with poor response times to telephone calls and crimes reported on line often receiving no response. The updated "Byway Open to All Traffic" signs are in the process of being installed by members of the Trail Riders Fellowship, who funded 50% of the cost of the signs. The Group is due to meet again on 19th February 2018.

3.6 Mountain Bike Working Group (Chaired by David Mir). The Group is next due to meet on 30th November 2017. At this meeting Kieran Foster, Cycling UK, will give a presentation on the 70k Cycle Surrey Hills Off-road Network which is being funded by the London Marathon Charitable Trust. There will also be a presentation and discussion on the proposed 35km single track network on Leith Hill, Holmbury and Pitch Hill. Meetings were held with the relevant landowners on the proposals which aim to manage mountain biking and mitigate landowner liability.

3.7 Cycle Surrey Hills. Working with Cycle UK, This will be supported by a marketing plan to promote the trail to inactive people, which is the target audience for the charity. The plan is to start implementing the project this year with a view to doing a major campaign involving health centres and a programme of rides in spring 2018. This will coincide with the 60th anniversary of the AONB designation.

3.8 Quiet Lanes and De-Cluttering Working Group (Chaired by Liz Cutter). The Group last met on 21 November 2017 in Ewhurst. The Group was updated on the Surrey Hills HGV and Quiet Lanes Strategy and on the guidance and roll out for sign

decluttering. The meeting included a site visit in Ewhurst to discuss potential measures and signing options for junctions in the village. Albury PC had recently removed the signs they had identified in their sign audit. This is part of a wider strategy to discourage HGV and through traffic movements on the country lane network by signing the principal routes. This strategy is being presented to the Guildford, Mole Valley and Waverley Local Committees.

3.9 Equestrian Working Group (Chaired by Dave Mir). The Group last met on 15th November 2017 in Coldharbour. Jane Garrett, a member of the Group, gave an update on the new trails she had identified since the last meeting and which will now be included on the Equestrian section of the Surrey Hills website. Mark Beaumont of the Hurtwood Trust had also identified and mapped two circular rides on the Hurtwood which he tabled at the meeting. Parking suitable for horse boxes is marked on the trail maps, although height barriers on many car parks prevent horse boxes from accessing them. Members of the Working Group formed a working party on 13th October and cleared a section of bridleway on Leith Hill. A further date is being set for the working party to tackle another section of bridleway on Leith Hill in the Spring. Plans were discussed for the “Horseman’s Sunday” event which is being held at St Martha’s Church on Sunday 22nd April 2017 as part of the Surrey Hills 60th Anniversary celebrations. The next meeting of the Group is scheduled for 21st February 2017.

3.10 North Downs Way National Trail. The National Trail network has successfully bid for a multi-million Discover England bid. The target is Northern European and North American walking market. The individual trails are putting forward various packages including “The Valleys and Vineyards of the Surrey Hills”. This also aligns to funding to develop pilgrimage tours.

3.11 North Downs Line. Working with the Community Rail Partnership, Great Western Trains and the North Downs National Trail, funding is being secured to provide information boards at the Shalford, Chilworth, Gomshall, Dorking, Betchworth and Reigate stations. This will include waymarking to the North Downs National Trail. The Partnership is chaired by Mike Goodman. This project should be promoted by April as part of the rail and train promotion.

3.12 Undergrounding Power Lines. We have received the feasibility reports on undergrounding power lines with UK Power Networks at Winterfold Heath and Alderbrook (the Mittal Estate). These will need to be developed into bids and presented to the Panel for decision.

4. ENJOYMENT AND UNDERSTANDING

4.1 Website. The recreational development to the website which includes a new, Cycling, Walking, Horse Riding and Arts & Culture section is drawing more traffic and being well accessed with Cycling still the most popular area. An on-line form has now been created where organisations can submit their own events to be uploaded to the website – this will be closely monitored regarding their relevance. The aim is to encourage a wide variety of events from across the Surrey Hills to feature on the website and ask organisations to offer a donation to the Surrey Hills Trust Fund in return for profiling their events. Plans are being discussed for a new Surrey Hills Trust Fund micro-site and further developments to the home page to make the site more user friendly. The top banner of the website will focus on the 60th anniversary going into 2018, to direct traffic to further information.

4.2 Google banner. The Surrey Hills was identified as a National Park on Google Maps in 2016. The Surrey Hills has the third highest number of reviews of all National Parks and AONBs (highest is New Forest and second is Dartmoor) with a rating of 4.6 out of 5 and 3,818 reviews.

4.3 Social Media. The Surrey Hills AONB continues to engage through Social Media channels. Recent activity has included working with the national family of AONBs to raise awareness of protected landscapes through #OutstandingHour on Twitter which is 1 hour every Wednesday where every AONB tweets about what is happening in their AONB. Topic areas that are particularly popular on the Surrey Hills channels include mountain and road biking activity and the exploratory drilling for oil on Leith Hill. The vandalism of the Inspiring Views sculpture 'Perspectives' received an outpouring of public upset and support for repairing & proved the power of social media.

You can join the Surrey Hills Social Media channels by visiting the website and clicking on the social media icons. Currently the Surrey Hills AONB has the following followers:

Twitter 3697; Facebook 2533; and Instagram 896.

4.4 PR. All press releases are sent to the local media and relevant publications and can be viewed on the Surrey Hills website at www.surreyhills.org/news. Since the last Board meeting stories have been released on bridleway clearance at Leith Hill co-ordinated by a team of volunteers from the Equestrian working group, clearing roadside clutter from Surrey's villages, specifically Albury, Surrey Hills Arts projects at Newlands Corner and Gatton Park and the vandalism done to the perspectives sculpture. Surrey Life and Vantage Point magazine continue to be active media partners for the AONB regularly coming to Caroline for Surrey Hills stories. Surrey Life magazine will feature a 'bumper' Surrey Hills themed edition in May to celebrate the 60th anniversary.

4.5 Drone footage of the Surrey Hills. From the Air, a drone filming company are currently out taking footage of the Surrey Hills for us to use to promote the area. They have been given the brief of a short 2 minute video to include moving image and still photographs of key areas in the Surrey Hills namely Frensham Ponds, Devil's Punchbowl, Newlands Corner, Leith Hill, Box Hill and Reigate Hill. The footage will feature autumnal and spring shots and will be another opportunity to raise the profile of the area during the 60th anniversary.

4.6 Bus & Rail Providers Collaboration. Great Western Railway are currently featuring our Tillingbourne Trails posters across their North Downs line. These posters promote the 7 walking trails created through the HLF Tillingbourne Trails project. Caroline is working with the rail and bus providers to secure poster and leaflet space for the 60th anniversary travel campaign.

4.7 Surrey Hills Arts. Surrey Unearthed is a project that has been developed with artists for new programme throughout 2018-19. This focuses on the natural materials of the Surrey Hills landscape, their history and uses over time. 10 artists will be researching their chosen material and creating new work in response to this in the form of outdoor installation, sound pieces and community celebration to coincide with the 60th year AONB designation. Projects include an illuminated large-scale earth work on farmland beneath Newlands Corner, an art documentary at the sand pits in East Surrey and a permanent structure at an inspiring viewpoint at Farnham Heath. Each project includes an engagement programme working with groups such as GASP, Art Matters and Post 19 as well as our successful creative health walks with those with mental health issues. We will hear back from our Arts Council application next week and continue to fundraise for this ambitious

project. We plan to launch the project next July at an exhibition of the artists research work at Leith Hill Place.

4.8 Heathland Artworks. This project will run again due to its success last year. RSPB and the University for the Creative Arts are keen to build on this project that saw Craft students from the BA and MA courses in wood, metal, glass, ceramics and textiles create work inspired by Farnham Heath. One of the pieces from this has subsequently been purchased and is being installed at Gostrey Meadows next Friday as a memorial to Creative Response's founder. Heathland Artworks 2018 kicks off with a lecture and site visit with the students next week. The launch will take place next June and the work in place throughout Summer ending in October to coincide with Farnham's Craft month.

4.9 Into the Hills. Following a workshop with landowners, activity providers and youth charities, a bid is being submitted in partnership with Surrey Youth Focus for a Young Roots Heritage Lottery Fund grant. This will target disadvantaged young people to undertake expeditions in the Surrey Hills in the summer of 2018, including skills training and creating an exhibition at Newlands Corner as part of the 60th celebrations. This will inform the AONB Management Plan and create an Into the Hills and Wild Weekend campaign for 2019.