

Date: 21st March 2018

Report: Surrey Hills AONB Unit Activity 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 The 25 Year Environment Plan. In February, Government published its long awaited 25 Year Environment Plan. All of the Plan's ambitious goals are directly relevant to protected landscapes and there is a renewed commitment by government to National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty with a clear goal to "enhance beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment". Chapter 2 of the Plan is entirely focused on recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of our landscapes. One of the key actions to achieving these goals is a full 21st century review of National Parks and AONBs which will "consider coverage of designations, how designated areas deliver their responsibilities, how designated areas are financed, and whether there is scope for expansion.

1.2 National Association for AONBs (NAAONB). The Association has been working closely with Defra on the 25 Year Environment Plan, particularly regarding the implication for AONBs and our role in delivery. This includes the offer to pilot new land management approaches. The AONB Director attended the national Away Day in Birmingham which included discussion around the 25 Year Plan, business planning and the review of the AONB Management Plans.

1.3 Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). Since it was established HLF has invested over £7.6bn of which £1.6bn has been on Land and Biodiversity. Last year HLF awarded £320m and in that year, with 27% awarded to the environmental sector. Also HLF had been encouraged by Government to spend some of the money held in reserve, but having reduced the balances and following poor performance from Lottery sales, HLF will have £190m in 2018. There is a major concern over the future of HLF funding for the natural environment. The AONB Director attended a workshop in London on 12th March and there is an online consultation on its role, vision and funding priorities for the next five years (see: <https://www.hlf.org.uk/about-us/news-features/we-want-hear-you-hlfs-future-direction-and-funding>).

1.4 Surrey University Symposium. Following the offer from Vice Chancellor, Max Lu, proposals are being developed for an evening symposium, potentially hosted by Broadcaster Michael Buerk. This would celebrate the Surrey Hills AONB over the last 60 years, followed by a series of key note speakers setting out their thoughts for what the Surrey Hills will be like in the next 60 years covering topics like climate change; ecosystem services; land use, development; recreation and tourism. This would be a large event to include the Surrey Hills Society and Enterprises Members, interest groups, councillors, academics and students. This would be followed by a small reception for civic dignitaries and speakers.

1.5 The 60th Anniversary in 2018. Projects are well underway to celebrate 60 years since the Surrey Hills was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Projects include

- The Surrey Life calendar featuring images of the Surrey Hills was distributed at the end of December and a photographic exhibition at Denbies took place in January.
- Civic Reception at Speakers House, Houses of Parliament on 8 May. Invitations issued and event being co-ordinated through the communications group.
- History of the Surrey Hills booklet, received Your Heritage lottery grant and nearing completion by Ken Bare from the Surrey Hills Society. The booklet will be launched at the Speakers House event.

- 6 anniversary limited edition prints have been created by artist Louise Dunckley and are already on sale. £5 for the sale of every print goes to the Surrey Hills Trust Fund. To date over 40 prints have been sold.
- Posters & a new web section have been created for a travel Campaign with rail and bus operators. South Western Railway have offered 15 sites for posters including Clapham Junction. Great Western Railway will distribute posters across their network and we have had feedback that Southern Railway will also engage with the campaign. MetroBus have provided the back of two double deckers to promote the campaign all free of charge. Posters also feature at bus stations and within Surrey bus timetables. The new web section provides ideas for days out and transport links.
- A new 60 places to visit in the Surrey Hills, pictorial section on the website is now live and has been well received.
- Michael More-Molyneux has agreed to host an event to celebrate the Surrey Hills Society at Loseley Park on 26 June.
- A series of Surrey Unearthed events will take place throughout 2018, delivered by Surrey Hills Arts to help raise awareness of the anniversary.

2. PLANNING

2.1 Local Plans. After receipt of the Local Plan Inspector's report concluding that the Plan as modified is sound, Waverley Borough Council adopted its Local Plan in February. This is followed by a 6 week period for any High Court challenges. The Plan provides for significant housing within the AONB at Chiddingfold, Milford and lesser AONB development at some other villages. Furthermore, it would seem that following the increased housing provision in the modifications to the Plan to meet the Local Plan Inspector's requirement the Plan should accommodate half of Woking's local plan shortfall. It seems likely that the housing provision for Haslemere, constrained by a tight AONB boundary, will involve further AONB housing sites there. Part 2 of the Local Plan and neighbourhood plans are currently being prepared will identify the actual sites.

The same Local Plan Inspector has been appointed to examine the Guildford Local Plan. The Hearing is expected to take place this summer. The Inspector indicated in his report on the Waverley Local Plan that the other half of Woking's housing shortfall may have to be accommodated by an increased housing provision in the Guildford Local Plan. It is hoped that the Inspector will not undermine Guildford Borough Council's laudable principle not to make any housing allocations in the AONB.

2.2 New National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). At the time of writing, the Government has published for consultation its new NPPF largely aimed at enabling many more homes to be built. It still gives great weight to conserving the landscape and scenic beauty of AONBs but has omitted existing amplification of this aim in the existing NPPF. The aim is that more homes should be directed to least affordable areas. Surrey, with its high house prices, is likely to be regarded as such an area.

A consultation response on behalf of the Board will be made after some exchanges of views with those in other AONBs in order to try to reach a consensus view. Many more homes are needed but they need to be in the right places.

2.3 Supreme Court AONB Ruling at Dover. National coverage was given to the successful challenge by the CPRE and NAAONB to Dover Council's grant of permission for substantial development in the AONB. The main point is that the Supreme Court ruled that the Council had not given adequate reasons for allowing the development in the

AONB. The effect of this ruling is likely to mean that Council's resolving to grant permission for housing and housing allocations in local plans need to explain clearly the exceptional circumstances and the public benefit for doing so.

2.4 The London Plan. The AONB Board has submitted comments that the Plan should look beyond London's boundaries to recognise the value and accessibility of the nationally protected landscapes that are on London's doorstep. The Plan currently fails to mention the protected landscapes that ring London: the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Surrey Hills AONB, Kent Downs AONB, which should be recognised as breathing spaces of strategic importance for London. They are nationally protected assets and some of the finest landscapes in the UK. As well as providing clean air, clean water and local food and drink products, they provide opportunities for peace and adventure, like walking, cycling, horse-riding and watching wildlife. The AONB Unit continues to promote where appropriate the 25 Year Vision for Protected Landscapes that was developed with Aecom.

2.5 Leith Hill Oil and Gas. This proposal for exploratory drilling for oil and gas continues to receive national publicity. A revised traffic management scheme has been to Surrey County Council for approval as the Council was not satisfied that the traffic management plan adequately addressed the impact on the narrow sunken lanes.

2.6 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 later in 2018.

3. LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION AND ACCESS

3.1 North Downs Farm Cluster – Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund (Chaired by Bert Broom). This farmer cluster covers the escarpment of the North Downs between Guildford and Dorking. The next meeting will take place on 22nd March and will agree the training objectives for 2018 and the proposed Defra Land Management Initiative that was discussed earlier in the meeting. This is being aligned with the Surrey Wildlife Trust corporate focus on the North Downs as a Biodiversity Opportunity Area and its Hedgerow Heroes project. Butterfly Conservation's Small Blue project has been undertaking extensive habitat creation work with volunteers over the winter and will be monitoring butterfly populations this year; with hopefully a great increase!

3.2 Greenscapes Cluster – Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund. In January, we were informed of another successful Facilitation Fund to work with a cluster of landowners looking at woodland issues in an area of South West Surrey. This includes the estates of Winterfold Forest, Wintershall, Birtley and the National Trust. The first meeting will take place on Tuesday 20th March to agree the programme.

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 Heritage Lottery funded project, which focused on the 7 villages along the Tillingbourne

Valley, has now come to an end. An annual meeting of the Steering Group will be held to review the legacy of the project and to ensure its on-going success. To this end a meeting was held on 5th March 2018. After the meeting the Steering Group visited Shere Museum to see the Tillingbourne Gallery, which contains an excellent collection of exhibits and was created as part of the project. The next meeting will be held in March 2019.

3.5 Byways Working Group (Chaired by David Wright). The Group last met on 12th February 2018. Mike Nash, SCC Partnership & Intelligence Officer, reported that DEFRA and the Environment Agency are working with local authorities to change the waste carrier licences, which are currently very easy to obtain, to a point system naming the person, company and vehicle and having this information available electronically at dumps. Members of the Group reported that they were still having problems using Surrey Police's Neighbourhood Alert, which has replaced "Country Watch", with poor response times to telephone calls and crimes reported on line often receiving no response. Mike Nash reported that the police are planning an "Evening of Action" to attempt to apprehend illegal off road drivers who are causing a great deal of damage both to byways and land off the byways. David Wright commended the Police on their pro-active approach. The updated "Byway Open to All Traffic" signs are continuing to be 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 15th June 2018.

3.6 Mountain Bike Working Group (Chaired by David Mir). A 35km single track network across Leith Hill, Holmbury Hill and Pitch Hill areas which aims to manage mountain biking and mitigate landowner liability. The big issue is about responsibilities for establishing and maintaining this network. A proposal is being discussed with the Surrey Hills Society Trustees on 20th March, which will be reported back to the AONB Board.

3.7 Cycle Surrey Hills. Working with Cycle UK, we are implementing this 70km off oard network in South West Surrey with funding from the London Marathon Charitable Fund. 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 summer 2018. Jeremy Hunt has agreed to launch the Cycle Surrey Hills on 8th June with the National Trust at Hindhead.

3.8 Quiet Lanes and De-Cluttering Working Group (Chaired by Liz Cutter). 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 was presented to the Guildford, Mole Valley and Waverley Local Committees. The next event will be a workshop on 11 April at Shalford Village Hall. It is hoped to extend the invitation to Local Committee Members and other Parish Councils not currently on the Working Group. It will include Colin Kemp, Cabinet Member for Highways, and Jason Russell, Deputy Director Environment and Infrastructure, to launch a De-clutter the Surrey Hills campaign as part of the 60th anniversary. The 11th will also profile the Broadband for Surrey Hills (B4SH) initiative.

3.9 Equestrian Working Group (Chaired by Dave Mir). The Group last met on 21st February 2018. Jane Garrett and Maggie Scott, members of the Group, have now resumed their identification of new equestrian trail which will be included on the Equestrian section of the Surrey Hills website. Parking suitable for horse boxes is marked on the trail maps, although height barriers on many car parks prevent horse boxes from accessing them.

Plans are progressing with the “Horseman’s Sunday” event which is being held at St Martha’s Church on Sunday 22nd April as part of the Surrey Hills 60th Anniversary celebrations. An online form has been created for those interested to register and a leaflet is being distributed to further promote the event. An information pack will be emailed to all those attending.

3.10 North Downs Way National Trail. The National Trail network has successfully bid for a multi-million Discover England grant. The target is the 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 project team is currently in Holland/ Germany attending trade shows, warming up domestic tour operators; they have taken crates of Hogsback TEA! This is part of a wider Ale for Trail campaign for which 13 breweries have signed up. It will be launched at the Wye Pilgrims Festival & Canterbury Food Fare. The North Downs Way is also involved with EU partners on a Green Pilgrimage project. Chris Howard will be going to Spain on the study tour to look at how to improve NDW experience. On a practical level, St Katherine’s-Bridge has been replaced at a cost of £20k and there has been resurfacing work in the Buckland area.

3.11 North Downs Line. Working with the Community Rail Partnership, Great Western Railway and the North Downs National Trail. Funding has been secured through Natural England, thanks to Pete Morris from the North Downs Way National Trail to provide information boards at the Shalford, Chilworth, Gomshall, Dorking(x2) and Betchworth stations. This will include waymarking to the North Downs National Trail. The Partnership is chaired by Mike Goodman.

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

3.13 Woodland Trust National Commemorative Woodland, Langley Vale. The AONB Director is the independent chair for the Langley Vale Open Spaces Advisory Group is overseeing the development of the England’s Centenary Wood 640 acres of rolling hills and fields near Epsom. The major challenge is to create this new landscape which is of European significance for grassland, particularly arable plants. This will also be a major visitor attraction and a gateway to link people and habitats to the AONB.

4. ENJOYMENT AND UNDERSTANDING

4.1 Website. Developments are underway to improve the home page of the Surrey Hills website and make it more user friendly. The aim is to include a revolving banner image at the top of the site, increase traffic to the Surrey Hills Enterprises members’ directory and focus on the recreational aspects of the Surrey Hills that the public are interested in. The new 60 places to see in the Surrey Hills has added a new element to the site and is being well accessed. Options are being discussed for the Surrey Hills Trust Fund site and whether to make it a micro-site with its own identity or include on the Community Foundation for Surrey website. Plans are also being discussed to establish a separate micro-site for the Surrey Hills Board.

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 AONBs with 5,477 reviews (averaging 4.6 out of 5), with only 4 National Parks having a higher number of reviews.

4.3 Social Media. The Surrey Hills AONB continues to engage through Social Media channels. Recent stories that have generated increased interest in the Surrey Hills include the launch of the new Surrey Hills hacking trails by Olympic medallist Pippa Funnel, our Facebook post reached over 12,000 people and was shared 57 times! Board Members 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 3870; Facebook 2702; and Instagram 1044.

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 the launch of the new hacking trails by Olympic medallist Pippa Funnell, Surrey Unearthed funding announcement, volunteers repairing the damage to the Perspectives sculpture and celebrating 60 years of the Surrey Hills. Surrey Life, Vantage Point and The Oxted magazine continue to be active media partners for the AONB regularly coming to Caroline for Surrey Hills stories.

Surrey Life magazine is producing a ‘bumper’ May edition which includes an article and timeline on the history of the Surrey Hills, a ‘people of the Surrey Hills’ feature, interview with artist Louise Dunckley who created the limited edition prints and a front cover. Surrey Life will also print extra copies for us to have available at the Speakers House event on 8 May.

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, winter 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. Caroline is working with South Western Railway, Great Western Railway, Southern, MetroBus and Compass Travel through the 60th anniversary travel campaign as mentioned above.

4.7 Surrey Hills Arts. Surrey Unearthed is an Arts Council funded project that has been developed with artists for an innovative programme throughout 2018-19. This focuses on the natural materials of the Surrey Hills landscape, their history and uses over time. Ten artists are researching & developing new work in response to their chosen material in the form of outdoor installation, art walks and community celebration to coincide with the 60th year AONB designation. Projects include an illuminated large-scale earth work on farmland beneath Box Hill, 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 Art Matters and Post 19 as well as our successful creative health walks with those with mental health issues. We will be delivering Arts Award to six schools which have a high level of disadvantaged pupils. There will be a Reception to launch the project next July alongside the Surrey Unearthed exhibition at Leith Hill Place. The project website, www.surreyunearthed.org will launch in April and show the various, artworks, walks, talks and workshops taking place throughout the year to July 2019.

4.8 Heathland Artworks. This project will run again due to its success last year. Surrey Hills Arts works in partnership with RSPB and the University for the Creative Arts as Craft

students from the BA and MA courses in wood, metal, glass, ceramics and textiles create work inspired by Farnham Heath. We ran tutorials with the students last month and this week the artworks will be selected by a panel. The works will be installed in June and the work will be exhibited throughout Summer ending in October to coincide with Farnham's Craft month.