

**Date:** 12<sup>th</sup> December 2018

**Report:** Surrey Hills AONB Unit Activity Report

**Written by:** Surrey Hills AONB Unit

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### **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:

- AONB Management Plan, Partnership and Coordination
- Landscape Conservation and Access
- Enjoyment and Understanding

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

### **Recommendations**

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

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Background papers: Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan 2014 - 2019

Attached:

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## **1. AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN, PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION**

**1.1 Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan.** The Have Your Say survey is open and will run until 14<sup>th</sup> January. This was promoted at the Symposium, through the website and being sent out to partners, including all the parish councils. The AONB Management Plan is being steered by the Officers Working Group, which will be developing the theme of My Surrey Hills. As part of the programme, a locally based videographer has been commissioned to create a series of 12 videos, each will be focused on an individual who will sum up what the Surrey Hills landscape means to them, ie the beneficiaries. The aim of the videos is to encourage a greater understanding and awareness of the Surrey Hills and make the AONB Management Plan policy framework more relevant to the wider public.

**1.2 National Association for AONBs.** The Chairman and AONB Director attended the AGM and annual Chairman's conference in Westminster on 29<sup>th</sup> November. The event was well attended and included National Park representatives. The key speakers were the Minister, Lord Gardiner, and Julian Glover, who is heading up the Government's Review of National Parks and AONBs.

**1.3 Government Review of Designated Landscapes.** The AONB team hosted Jim Dixon, who sits on the Glover Review Panel, on the 28<sup>th</sup> November before he attended the Surrey Hills Symposium that evening. This was arranged at last minute and the Planning Adviser took him on a quick tour including a visit to the AONB Office, the National Trust and to Manor Farm, to hear about and see some of the issues. Jim started his work life for Waverley Countryside Service and was please to revisit the Surrey Hills.

**1.4 Future Landscapes Programme.** The National Association for AONBs has secured £164,300 Resilient Heritage grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. This will involve reviewing the viability of the NAAONB charity model, which will be supported by Simon Matthews Associates. It also includes a professional development programme for staff to share knowledge and collaborate more effectively. Rob Fairbanks and Ali Clarke are both enrolled on the programme. This will run until November 2019 and should be a good demonstration to inform the Glover Review.

**1.5 South East and East Protected Landscapes.** The next meeting of the National Parks and AONBs in the region will take place on Friday 10<sup>th</sup> December. The main discussion will be signing off a regional submission to the Glover Review and to discuss collaborative ideas for celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1949 National Park and Access to the Countryside Act next year. Caroline Price is leading work with the South Downs NPA on expanding the public transport campaign that was so successful this year with the Surrey Hills.

**1.6 Defra bid.** Following the AGM on 12th September, the AONB Unit's business plan and work programmes are being updated and will be submitted to Defra by the end of December.

**1.7 Surrey Hills Symposium.** Surrey University hosted the inaugural Surrey Hills Symposium on 28<sup>th</sup> November. This was the last major event that celebrated the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the AONB Designation. The theme was to celebrate, inspire and debate a vision for the Surrey Hills over the next 60 years. Although it was sold out with 400 guests, unfortunately there were a lot of no shows due to traffic congestion on the A3 and the inclement weather. The event was sponsored by Wates, which is keen to support a Symposium in future years. The AONB Board is also grateful to the speakers, panellists,

the University team and to Denbies and Silent Pool Distillery for sponsoring the VIP drinks reception.

**1.8 Surrey Hills Chairman's meeting.** The last meeting was on 2<sup>nd</sup> November. It reviewed the Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan Monitoring Report, considered the fundraising strategy and the collaboration arrangements, which proposed the establishment of the Collaboration Group, which was considered earlier.

**1.9 Surrey Hills Statutory Members Group.** This Group last met on 3<sup>rd</sup> December. The main focus was to review the Constitution for the AONB Board. The Group will make recommendations to the next AONB Board meeting that will seek to adopt a new Constitution along with the AONB Management Plan.

**1.10 Rural Surrey LEADER.** Thanks to the efforts of the Leader team, particularly Cathy Miles and Sarah Thiele, the Local Action Group received additional funding that has made grant awards to support rural development, including many projects in the Surrey Hills.

**1.11 Surrey Nature Partnership.** The AONB Director represents the Surrey Hills on the Local Nature Partnership (LNP). The next meeting will be on 10<sup>th</sup> December. This will be an opportunity to review progress and discuss a Local Natural Capital Plan pilot covering Kent, Sussex and Surrey with our neighbouring LNPs and the Local Enterprise Partnerships.

**1.12 Environmental Land Management Schemes.** There has been no feedback from Defra on the Test and Trial proposal for a new Environmental Land Management Scheme that the AONB Board submitted with Surrey University and the Surrey Nature Partnership. We are now investigating a more collaborative approach with the South Downs NPA and other partners.

## **2. LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION AND ACCESS**

**2.1 Farm Clusters.** The North Downs and Greenscapes Farm Clusters are both very active and starting to share training and information between the farms and landowners. The respective Facilitators are funded through the AONB Board with a Natural England grant. In 2019, we are still proposing 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.

**2.2 Byways Working Group (Chaired by David Wright).** The Group last met on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2018. Wolverns Lane continues to be a priority. The Group is grateful for the support of volunteer members of the Trail Riders Fellowship for putting up the new signs explaining user responsibilities on the Byways Open to All Traffic.

**2.3 Mountain Bike Working Group** 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 over which there has been limited progress is identifying an organisation responsible for establishing and maintaining this network.

**2.4 Cycle Surrey Hills – South West Surrey.** Working with volunteers from Cycling UK, efforts are continuing to enhance the user experience of this network that was launched by Jeremy Hunt in the summer. This will include updating the way-marking and promoting the “Be Nice, Say Hi” campaign with the BHS. Haslemere Station is also being developed as a gateway with Trusty The Cow being recommissioned and repainted by Louise Dunckley to sit outside the station

**2.5 Cycle Surrey Hills - Mole Valley Trail.** Katie McDonald at Surrey County Council has secured a Stage 1 pass for EAFRD funding from Coast to Capital to develop a multi-user trail that will link proposed cycle hubs at the Woodland Trust’s Langley Vale, Denbies and the Surrey Hills Business Park, Wotton. This was discussed at the Partnership Tour in July.

**2.6 Highway Working Group (Chaired by Liz Cutter).** The Group is pursuing wider strategy to discourage HGV and through traffic movements on the country lane network by signing the principal routes, which needs to be progressed through the Guildford, Mole Valley and Waverley Local Committees. As a result of the strategic working with Surrey University, we are looking to develop research and evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of the approach and how to share best practice nationally.

**2.6.1 Demonstration Projects.** As part of the strategy, a series of demonstration projects are being developed with advice from Colin Davis. The aim is to identify rural schemes that conserve and enhance the character of rural lanes, that create safer environments for all road users and that do not require Traffic Orders. If this is possible and agreed by Highways, the expectation is that the local communities would fund and maintain. Demonstration projects being progressed are at Compton, Coldharbour and Holmbury. This may also be an opportunity for the Surrey Hills Trust Fund to support high profile community projects.

**2.6.2 Sign de-clutter.** In the meantime. Liz Cutter has been undertaking some fantastic sign de-cluttering around the village of Holmbury. This was profiled at the Surrey Association of Local Councils AGM as an example of great practical volunteering. It is hoped that this work can continue in 2019.

**2.7 Equestrian Working Group:** The Group last met on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2018. A review of the Horseman’s Sunday held on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2018 was undertaken and, due to its success, the Group was keen to hold a similar event in 2019. Revd Stephanie Sokolowski of St Martha’s Church has confirmed her availability for Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> April 2019. Nine equestrian trails have now been identified and ridden by members of the Group and are available to download from the equestrian section of the Surrey Hills website. It is proposed that the trails will be waymarked and to promote the “Be Nice, Say Hi” campaign, which encourages positive communication between various users of the bridleway network. The Group is due to meet again on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2019.

**2.8 North Downs Way National Trail.** The Trail Partnership has had an active programme this year as part of its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. A major project is the Great Trails of England which includes “The Valleys and Vineyards of the Surrey Hills”. The Trail Manager is looking to recruit and train a small group of Ambassadors to lead guided walks on the North Downs Way. There is also an initiative with local breweries in Kent, Medway and Surrey to create an “Ale Trail” that was launched with a Beer Festival at The Tickled Trout on 29<sup>th</sup> & 30<sup>th</sup> September 2018 at the Wye Pilgrims Festival. This marks

the 40th anniversary of the North Downs Way where the trail was formally launched in 1978.

**2.9 Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Forgotten Landscapes bid.** Following the unsuccessful Into the Hills bid, a bid is being developed with the Surrey Hills Society about incorporating the project into a Forgotten Landscapes which aims to expand our understanding of rural medieval settlement across the Surrey Hills. The Society is considering HLF feedback from the pre-application enquiry and the next steps.

**2.10 Ash Dieback.** There is no abundant evidence of ash dieback in the Surrey Hills. Ash is a dominant woodland species across much of the Surrey Hills, particularly on the North Downs where it naturally regenerated following the Great Storms of 1987 and 1990. The Forestry Commission is leading on advice and felling licences. There is a particular concern with public safety as the tree starts dying in the canopy with the risk of branch fall. Surrey Wildlife has decided to be more pro-active in clearing ash in a 60 meter corridor of publicly accessible tracks on Sheepleas SSSI and at Norbury Park which has led to much public concern.

### **3. ENJOYMENT AND UNDERSTANDING**

**3.1 Website.** The Surrey Hills website has been updated to make it easier to navigate through the whole site. A revolving banner image now features at the top of the site to signpost to recreational opportunities, events and local food and drink. The Surrey Hills Enterprises area of the site has been refreshed to benefit members including a new members' directory. Google analytics show that the website is being well accessed by the public achieving on average of around 16,500 visits per month. Our walk/run, cycle, events, days out and 60 places to see sections consistently appear to be the most popular areas of the website. Discussions are underway to better link the website with the Surrey Hills Society site as well as to establish a separate micro-site for the Surrey Hills Board later in 2019 to coincide with the new Management Plan.

**3.2 Google banner.** The Surrey Hills was identified as a National Park on Google Maps in 2016. The Surrey Hills with 8,312 reviews (averaging 4.6 out of 5) has now fallen into second place behind the Cotswolds with 8,541 (also averaging 4.6 out of 5). The Chilterns AONB is in third place with 6,839 (averaging 4.5 out of 5).

**3.3 Social Media.** Our social media channels continue to play a vital role in spreading the word about the work we do. A Facebook campaign was undertaken to spread the word about the Surrey Hills Symposium. This helped to raise awareness of the event and bookings had to be closed 2 weeks early due to it selling out. 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 4376; Facebook 3216; and Instagram 1305.

**3.4 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](http://www.surreyhills.org/news). Since the last Board meeting stories have been released on; the Surrey Unearthed Harvest celebration event, the Surrey Hills Symposium, Community Rail Partnership maps unveiled at stations, the Glover review etc. We continue to work closely with Surrey Life and Vantage Point magazines who actively support the Surrey Hills through regular coverage. Relationships are currently being developed with the Surrey Downs Magazine and Guide To magazine.

**3.5 Drone footage of the Surrey Hills.** Our drone footage is now complete and short 1 minute videos have been produced of Frensham Ponds, the Devil's Punch Bowl, Newlands Corner, Leith Hill, Reigate Hill and Box Hill. The footage features autumnal, winter and spring shots. The footage was also amalgamated into the Surrey Hills Symposium film which was shown at Surrey University. The drone footage will feature on the website and be released through our Social Media channels.

**3.6 Bus & Rail Campaign.** The Surrey Hills travel campaign ran with South Western Railway, Great Western Railway, Southern, Metrobus and Compass Travel from April-September. Posters and postcards could be spotted at stations across these networks. We have had a surge in interest to our 'Days out in the Surrey Hills' web section with over 20,000 views so far. Through our relationship with Metrobus we secured the back of two double decker buses which are now adorned with our anniversary artwork and will be for the next two years. The South Downs National Park has shown great interest in this project and is keen to replicate the work in a 2019 campaign.

**3.7 70 years of protected landscapes.** 2019 marks 70 years since Government passed an Act of Parliament to establish National Parks and AONBs. To recognise this the Surrey Hills and South Downs National Park are collaborating to co-ordinate a campaign to celebrate protected landscapes in the South East. So far Chichester Harbour, the High Weald and Kent Downs AONBs have signed up and it is hoped the New Forest and Isle of Wight will also join in. The aim is to work with transport providers to encourage awareness of protected landscapes and encourage use of sustainable transport. It is proposed that nostalgic imagery echoing rail posters of the past will be used and to date Gatwick, DFDS and South Western Rail are interested in taking part.

**3.8 Girl Guiding Surrey.** Thanks to Stella Cantor of the Surrey Hills Society we have successfully collaborated with Girl Guiding Surrey to produce a guide badge and educational resource pack. The badge and resource pack have now been produced and are currently being promoted to guiding groups throughout Surrey. The aim of this work is to raise awareness of the Surrey Hills amongst a younger audience. It is hoped that we will be able to roll out what we have created to Scouting groups.

**3.9 Surrey Unearthed.** A huge amount of public engagement has taken place through Summer & Autumn. Over 100 children have taken their Arts Award qualifications led by the participating artists. This involves 4 modules including artist talk and workshop and guided walk to experience their artworks. Public engagement has also included a Big Draw event on Newlands Corner and the Harvest celebration on Box Hill. [www.surreyunearthed.org](http://www.surreyunearthed.org)

**3.9.1 Harvest.** Mary Branson and her team installed 65 illuminated outlines of hay bales in the lower field at Box Hill Farm in September. The bales had been constructed by over fifty volunteers leading up to this. The resulting illuminated bales highlighted the hidden work carried out by the farming community and how climate change is impacting on them. Each weekend through September, Mary led a dusk walk from Box Hill viewpoint to the field and back explaining the meaning and process. These were all fully booked. On Saturday 29th September at dusk, we held a community celebration of the landscape highlighting the 60 year anniversary. This included hand-held lanterns made in school workshops, singing of traditional harvest songs and a Calling event led by Artist Alison

Carrier. You can view the film here: <https://www.surreyuneearthed.org/harvest-box-hill-event>

**3.9.2 Terrain.** Jane Ponsford has been travelling across the AONB collecting natural materials and drawing pigments from the bark and berries she finds. She includes these natural dyes and materials in her paper artworks. In each location, Witley Common, Box Hill and Newlands Corner, she has engaged with communities including adults with mental health issues from the Mary Frances Trust, children excluded from school in Waverley and young people with mental health issues from Guildford CYP in addition to outdoor public paper making workshops. From February – April 2019, Jane will be resident at Reigate Hill as her last site to explore. She will be leading 60 children from Oxted School through their Arts Award as part of this residency. See <https://www.surreyuneearthed.org/terrain/>

**3.9.3 Unearthed.** Artist Amanda Loomes created two art documentaries of East Surrey's sand pits 'Whole' and 'Persistent Place.' She gave talks and screenings in October at Titsey Estate where the audience included the pit workers, and at Farnham Eco Cinema. Her films are also being shown in Portsmouth at Aspex Gallery and part of the upcoming London Group's exhibition.

**3.10 Heathland Artworks.** This project allows BA and MA students from craft, design and fine art courses at the University for the Creative Arts to take part in a real project. We are currently commencing the 3<sup>rd</sup> Heathland Artworks with a lecture on preparing proposals and site visit to the RSPB Farnham Heath.

**3.11 Surrey Hills Arts Mailing List.**

For updates, please sign up to the Surrey Hills Arts mailing list: [www.surreyuneearthed.org/mailling-list](http://www.surreyuneearthed.org/mailling-list).