

**Date:** 19<sup>th</sup> June 2019  
**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:

- Advocacy, Partnership and Coordination
- Planning
- Landscape Conservation and Access
- Enjoyment and Understanding

The report includes updates from the Working Groups

### **Recommendations**

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

---

Background papers: Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan 2014 - 2019

Attached:

Contact details:

Author: Rob Fairbanks  
Job title: Surrey Hills AONB Director  
Contact no: 01372 220650  
E-mail: rob.fairbanks@surreyhills.org.uk

## 1. ADVOCACY, PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION

**1.1 National Association for AONBs.** The focus for the Association's work is providing information and advice to the Glover Review. The AONB teams are feeding into the process. The Panel is expected to report in the autumn, perhaps in time for the party political conference session, and then the Government will need to determine what to do with it. Julian Glover will be attending the National Association conference in Colchester in July. Other consultations and lobbying have included the Agricultural Bill and Biodiversity Net Gain, which both could have major impacts on the conservation and enhancement of the Surrey Hills.

**1.2 SE Protected Landscapes.** There have been various discussions around closer working between the National Parks and AONBs in the South East and East of England. This includes representations to the Glover Review about setting up a more collaborative structure to share resources, fundraising and learning. The AONB Director has met separately with the CEO of the South Downs National Park Authority with the agreement to support areas like the Rail and Bus Campaign, the Trust Fund and the New Environmental Land Management System.

**1.3 London City Region – Restoring the Future.** One of the major themes rumored to be coming out of the Glover review is the relationship of the Designated Landscapes to nearby conurbations, rather than the importance of the landscapes for their own intrinsic values. This has resulted in a campaign to visualise a 'greener, healthier and wilder' led by Daniel Raven-Elison, founder of the London National Park City, supported by the Surrey Hills, Chilterns and the Kent Downs. We are currently identifying high profile judges. The campaign is planned to launch in June alongside the Mayor of London's announcement of the world's first National Park City, with an event in late autumn to announce the results. This will be part of the 70th anniversary of the 1949 National Park and Access to the Countryside Act.

**1.4 Taking the Lead - Future Landscapes Programme.** The NAAONB has secured a major HLF Resilient Heritage grant to develop AONB teams to be more collaborative in sharing resources and best practice. Rob Fairbanks and Ali Clarke are representing the Surrey Hills AONB on the programme and will be running workshops in the July Conference. They are involved respectively on working groups looking at technology, communications and the arts. As part of the programme, local consultancy Simon Matthews Associates is reviewing the business model for the NAAONBs. This should inform the Glover Review.

**1.5 Surrey University Symposium.** Proposals are being developed to host another Symposium event at Surrey University in the autumn. The provisional date is 27<sup>th</sup> November. This will be an opportunity to launch the AONB Management Plan and to profile the Into the Wild, project that is being supported by the Surrey Hills Trust Fund, highlighting research with the University including Living Environments for Healthy Aging and Nurturing through Nature, which is the High Sheriff's theme for the year.

**1.6 Rural Surrey LEADER.** The Local Action Group (LAG) has allocated in excess of £1.6m over the past 4 years to eligible rural based businesses, communities along with farmers, growers and foresters. The last funding window closed in March and the LAG will be reviewing the last 15 applications. There is concern that with the Government focus on Environmental Land Management Schemes that there will not be a fund to support rural development that helps to sustain land based business in the future.

**1.7 Surrey Hills to South Downs CRP.** Funding has been secured for a new Community Rail Partnership (CRP) titled Surrey Hills to South Downs, which covers the stations on the South West Trains line between Guildford and Haslemere. This provides a great opportunity to improve the stations, visitor information and the general promotion of public transport to the Surrey Hills and closer links with the South Downs National Park. It follows the success of the North Downs Line CRP between Gatwick and Guildford.

## **2. PLANNING**

**2.1 Boundary Review.** No further information is currently available as to when the Boundary Review will commence. The previous reason for the delay was because Natural England's (NE) staff were involved in the Suffolk Coast and Heath's AONB Boundary Review. That has now reached an advanced stage where NE has published a Notice that it proposes to make an Order designating additional land as AONB. Once confirmed by the Secretary of State for Defra the review will be completed.

NE had indicated that the Surrey Hills AONB boundary review should await the Government's Glover Review of Protected Landscapes expected in September. We understand that the Glover Review Panel are possibly concerned that any boundary reviews should await the outcome of their work.

**2.2 Local Plan update.** The CPRE's legal challenge to the Waverley Local Plan Part 1, essentially about the proposed new housing provision, was dismissed in the High Court. The CPRE was dissatisfied with the judge's reasoning relating to the Inspector's requirement that the Plan provides for half of Woking's unmet housing need and have gained leave to take its appeal in this respect further to the Court of Appeal. The case is expected to be heard this month and any news will be reported orally at the meeting.

Towards the end of last year Waverley Borough Council deferred the Officers' recommended revision of its Waverley Local Part 2 in order to carry out further consultations. That revised version of the Plan which is more detailed than Local Plan Part 1 provided for several housing allocation in the AONB in Milford and Haslemere to be deleted. That welcome move demonstrated the Council had heeded objections to those proposals affecting the AONB. Further, the new Witley Neighbourhood Plan has preferred the Parish's housing allocation to be mostly at the Secretts site towards the centre of Milford rather than the remaining AONB sites the Borough Council had still proposed for Milford.

Developers have carried out a public consultation in May to extend the emerging Local Plan proposal for 50 dwellings in the AGLV south of Haslemere into the adjoining AONB increasing the housing provision to about 140 dwellings. The design is good and several planning gains have been offered presumably to persuade the Borough Council to include the larger site in the Local Plan Part 2.

Guildford Borough Council has adopted its new Local Plan but as it was during the purdah period this is subject to a High Court challenge along with other legal challenges against aspects of the Plan. The Plan contains no development allocations in the Surrey Hills AONB and the AONB/AGLV policy has been found sound.

The Draft Mole Valley Local Plan is expected to be published for consultation later this year.

The Reigate and Banstead Submission Development Management Plan which follows the Council's adoption of its Core Strategy in 2014, has been subject to an Inspector's hearing.

Modifications to the Plan are currently subject to consultation. The Plan's landscape protection Policy NHE1 is considered to be appropriately worded to cover the AONB and AGLV.

An Inspector has been appointed to examine Tandridge's "Our Local Plan: 2033". Again, the Plan's approach to the AONB and AGLV is good.

**2.3 Planning application overview.** The number of responses your Planning Adviser has made to planning application consultations has been at a similar level to last year's high number of over 300. So far there have been no proposals of great significance.

**2.4 Dark Skies.** Led by the Guildford Astrological Society, a Dark Skies Partnership in Surrey is developing involving the Society, Surrey University, the National Trust, Surrey Wildlife Trust and CPRE. Dark Skies was identified in the AONB Management Plan process as a significant characteristic of the Surrey Hills and related initiatives have been developing across the family of National Parks and AONBs. These include research to identify Dark Sky areas, providing planning guidance through to public awareness campaigns, walks, talks and events.

### **3. LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION AND ACCESS**

**3.1 Environmental Land Management System.** The Surrey Hills proposal has been incorporated into a national Farming for the Nation bid which has been submitted by the National Association for AONBs. The idea is to research and co-design (with farmers) a strategic, landscape scale approach to targeting payments for natural capital (environment and amenity). The Surrey Hills could get about £40k - £50k out of a £0.5m pot for 'research and design'. This should include payments for farmers and landowners to input against standard rates. Defra want the projects to be completed within a year in order to inform the design of the Pilot that will start in 2021. We are still awaiting the contract from Defra but expect this to come in July and to deliver it through the Farm Clusters. In the meantime we have developed closer relations with the O.S. to undertake 'natural capital mapping, and with 02 to profile visitors to the Surrey Hills based on crowd source geo-data.

**3.2 Farm Clusters.** The AONB unit supports two farm cluster groups through the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund. These are for the North Downs, between Guildford and Dorking, and Greenscapes, focusing on large woodland estates in the Godalming and Cranleigh areas. These provide the opportunity for landscape scale working and are central to delivering any Environmental Land Management Scheme. Recent activity has included training on pollinators and a joint training programme on tree disease, pollinators and data.

**3.3 Vineyards.** The Vineyards of the Surrey Hills consortium will be launching in June. For more information see: <https://www.surreyhillsvineyards.co.uk>. One of the Test and Trail proposals for ELMS is to research and design a scheme that would enhance the nature conservation assets of vineyards. This is a partnership with Wine UK, the Kent Downs and the South Downs.

**3.4 Ash Dieback.** As reported to the last AONB Board meeting, there is now 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 licenses. Surrey Wildlife has been pro-active in clearing ash in a 60 meter corridor of publicly accessible tracks at Norbury Park by the forestry contractor

Euroforest. This has led to much public concern, but does provide an opportunity for education and to enhance open habitats and amenity through the creation of viewpoints.

**3.5 Byways Working Group** The Group last met on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2019. Wolvens 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 which explain user responsibilities on the Byways Open to All Traffic. Thanks also go to the Surrey Green Lanes Association (GLASS) for the financial support they have offered the Forestry Commission towards the measures they propose to put in place to stop the ease in which vehicles can access their land illegally. A day of action was carried out on 19<sup>th</sup> May involving the Police, the Forestry Commission, GLASS and the Trail Riders Fellowship. The object of this event was to promote good behaviour and interaction between users in order to generate understanding and good will.

**3.6 Mountain Bike Working Group.** The Group last met on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 at Leith Hill Place. Funding has been awarded by the London Marathon Trust for the “Cycle Surrey Hills” project which is a network of over 80km of off-road cycling in South West Surrey. Further funding is being sought (possibly through Coast to Capital LEP) to extend the network in the Mole Valley area. This network is aimed at leisure cyclists. The Surrey Hills Challenge event is being held on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2019 at Denbies Wine Estate. This event will involve the British Horse Society, runners and cyclists and is being underwritten by the Rutland Group. All registration fees will go into the Surrey Hills Trust Fund, once costs have been covered.

**3.7 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 be sited outside the station

**3.8 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 Denbies and the Surrey Hills Business Park, Wotton. This will be an extension of the south west project, with a planned waymarked promoted link along the North Downs Way. The bid will be submitted in June.

**3.9 Highway Working Group (Chaired by Liz Cutter).** The Surrey Hills Highway Strategy, the aim of which is to encourage through traffic and HGVs to use the Principal Highways and to discourage the use of country lanes. Presentations were given on traffic calming schemes that could be considered for Westcott, Coldharbour and Holmbury, which included removing white lines and reducing speed limits through the village centres. The Group was updated on the changes to the signs regulations and best practice in traffic calming schemes. As a result of the decluttering campaign a large number of unnecessary signs had been removed from Holmbury Village. It is planned to declutter a further 5 villages/parishes in 2019. The next meeting of the Group is on 13<sup>th</sup> June in Hambledon, where there are concerns around the growth in HGV and vehicle movements resulting from increased development and congestion on principal roads. These issues are being considered by Local Committee. For more information see: <http://www.gu8superfast.co.uk>.

**3.10 Equestrian Working Group:** The Group last met on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2019. Following the success of the 2018 Horseman’s Sunday, a similar event was held on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2019. The Revd Stephanie Sokolowski of St Martha’s Church took the service. Over 30 horses took

part, plus a similar number of spectators. Eleven 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 will promote the current “Be Nice, Say Hi” campaign, which encourages positive communication between various users of the bridleway network. The Group is due to meet again on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2019.

**3.11 North Downs Way National Trail.** A major project is the Great Trails of England in which the North Downs Way is being promoted alongside other Trails to overseas markets (see: <https://www.greatenglishtrails.com>.) The Trail Manager is looking to recruit and train a small group of Ambassadors to lead guided walks on the North Downs Way. We are also working on various access improvements, including at the Watts Gallery and Newlands Corner, and to identify further Inspiring Views. The Surrey Hills hosted an international delegation looking at ‘pilgrimage’ with a visit to Farnham Heath and the Heathland Artworks.

#### **4. ENJOYMENT AND UNDERSTANDING**

**4.1 Website.** The Surrey Hills website was reviewed in January by the Collaboration Group with a shortlist of priorities taken forward. All updates have now been completed including; profiling the work of the AONB family through a new footer and ‘about us’ section, Society banner and link from home page, more focused event categories and a featured event box etc.. The focus for the website this year is to make it easier to navigate and more consumer friendly which will include developing a new ‘Where to Stay’ section. Other major developments for this year will include a new Trust Fund micro-site and introducing a crowd-funding portal into the arts area.

Our Google analytics show an increase in visitors to the website. Since the last AONB Board meeting in March 20,500 people have visited the website on average each month, compare this to 2018 when we averaged 16,500 per month.

**4.2 Google banner.** The Surrey Hills was identified as a National Park on Google Maps in 2016. The Surrey Hills has 10,394 reviews (averaging 4.6 out of 5). The Cotswolds has 11,130 reviews (also averaging 4.6 out of 5) and The Chilterns AONB 6,839 (averaging 4.5 out of 5). The Google banner offers an excellent way to drive traffic to the Surrey Hills website.

**4.3 Social Media.** Our social media channels continue to play a vital role in spreading the word about the work we do. The aim is to increase our social media following and video appears to be a popular way to do this. Board Members are encouraged to 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** 4764 (an increase of 199); **Facebook** 4229 (an increase of 446); **Instagram** 1644 (an increase of 180).

**4.4 My Surrey Hills Campaign.** Our *My Surrey Hills* series of videos are proving popular with over 30,000 views on Facebook alone since January. Each month a new video is released via our social media channels. Each video features people that live, work in or simply enjoy visiting the Surrey Hills. Since the last Board meeting in March we have profiled Peter Wade a National Trust volunteer and Ian Giles a mountain biker. The aim of the campaign is to show how important it is that the Surrey Hills are protected through our policies in the Management Plan into the future for people to benefit.

Please visit [www.surreyhills.org/my-surrey-hills/](http://www.surreyhills.org/my-surrey-hills/) to view all the videos.

**4.5 PR.** Press releases have been written on the Horseman's Sunday event, Rail to Trail, walks and signage at Oxted Station, conservation work to increase numbers of the Small Blue butterfly, Surrey Hills Arts sculpture on Farnham Heath, My Surrey Hills and more... We were lucky enough to get Jenny Seagrove to attend the Surrey launch of the 'Be Nice Say Hi' campaign in early June at Watts Gallery. The campaign in collaboration with Cycling UK and the British Horse Society is an awareness raising campaign to help cyclists and horse riders to pass each other safely. We are expecting a good level of coverage from this photocall. 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).

**4.6 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 leading a campaign to celebrate protected landscapes in the South East. The High Weald, Kent Downs and Chichester Harbour AONBs have also signed up. The major transport providers in the South East (South Western, Southern, Great Western, South Eastern, Stagecoach South & East, Brighton & Hove and Metrobus) have agreed to support the campaign through their on station marketing collateral and digital media. The aim is to encourage awareness of protected landscapes and encourage use of sustainable transport amongst a younger demographic (17-35 year olds). A design agency in Guildford has been commissioned to produce artwork, a microsite and all digital media. The campaign will go live from 22 July.

**4.7 Girl Guiding Surrey.** We are delighted with the interest and uptake on the 'Into the Surrey Hills' badge and resource pack created in partnership with the Surrey Hills Society. Stella Cantor of the Surrey Hills Society has worked extremely hard to sell the badge into the Surrey divisions of the Girl Guiding Association and to date over 700 worksheets and badges have been purchased. Badges sell at £1 per badge with funds going to the Surrey Hills Society. The aim of this work is to raise awareness of the Surrey Hills amongst a younger audience. Feedback through the guiding association has been that parents have been prompted to visit places within the Surrey Hills at the weekends. It is hoped that we will be able to roll out what we have created to Scouting groups.

**4.8 Rail to Ramble 2019.** We are working in partnership with the Haslemere Community Rail Partnership and the Surrey Hills Society to produce a Rail to Ramble walking route from Haslemere to Godalming station. The South Downs National Park have worked in partnership with the Haslemere Community Rail Partnership to produce a walk from Haslemere to Liphook and this new walk into the Surrey Hills will look similar in design style to create a suite of leaflets. It is hoped to launch the new leaflet in July.

**4.9 Surrey Hills Arts: Surrey Unearthed.** This Arts Council programme continues until October finishing with an art and landscape symposium, *Unearthing Landscapes*, at the University for the Creative Arts. Booking is open:  
<https://www.surreyunearthed.org/unearthing-landscapes-symposium/>

**4.10 'House of Invisible Hands'** Alongside Walter Bailey's new permanent sculptural shelter at Farnham Heath, is a mass participation artwork. This community project features hundreds of kindling sticks where individuals have created faces using pyrography to represent the hidden workers on our landscape. Participants include those from Creative Response, Ochre Printable, Bloomin' Arts and the Orpheus Centre. 'KINDling' will be installed on the heath at the beginning of August.

**4.11 Harvest.** We are currently planning another ‘Harvest’ event at Box Hill due to last year’s feedback. We’re partnering with Surrey Arts, Mole Valley DC and the National Trust to deliver this event on 28 September. You can view the film of last year’s here:  
<https://www.surreyunearted.org/harvest-box-hill-event>

**4.12 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. Launch date Thursday 20, 5-7pm all welcome. Exhibition on until 27 October.

**4.13 Inspiring Views.** We have developed a new ‘Inspiring Views’ project commissioning artist Will Nash. Working with the Albury Estate, we are launching a crowd funding campaign to fund this.

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