

Date: 27th March 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. There were over 1000 responses to the Call for Evidence in December 2018 and the Panel Members are visiting various AONBs and National Park teams. 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. 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 rumoured 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. 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 of 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. This will be an opportunity to launch the AONB Management Plan and to profile some of the research opportunities with the University including Living Environments for Healthy Aging and with the Environmental Psychology faculty on rural highways.

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 January 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 Collaboration Group. The Group brings together the Surrey Hills family to ensure closer collaborative working. It is chaired by the AONB Director. It last met on March 21st and reviewed the website, social media, newsletters and events.

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 have 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 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. Unsatisfied with the reasoning given in that High Court decision the CPRE has gained leave to take its appeal further to the Court of Appeal.

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.

Guildford Borough Council is awaiting the final full report of the Inspector following his conclusions to the second hearing he recently concluded. No further modifications to the plan are expected to be necessary for it to be found sound. Once the Inspector's report has been received it will be reported to Full Council for the Plan to be formally adopted. The Plan contains no development allocations in the Surrey Hills AONB.

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 Surrey University, the National 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 will 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. The AONB Director has been asked to attend a Defra 'Proposal Holder' event on Wednesday 20th.

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.

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 licences. 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 (Chaired by David Wright). The Group last met on 11th 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 is planned involving the Police, the Forestry Commission, GLASS and the Trail Riders Fellowship, with a view to advising motorised lane users of best practice and possibly apprehending drivers of untaxed vehicles. The Group is due to meet again on 13th May 2019.

3.6 Mountain Bike Working Group The Group has identified a 35km single track network across Leith Hill, Holmbury Hill and Pitch Hill areas, which aims to manage mountain biking and mitigate landowner liability. There has been limited progress due to the difficulty in identifying an organisation that is willing to be responsible for establishing and maintaining this network. The Group is due to meet on 1st April 2019 to take this proposal forward.

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 the Woodland Trust’s Langley Vale, 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.

3.9 Highway Working Group (Chaired by Liz Cutter). The Group last met on 21st January 2019 when it considered 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. A date for the next meeting of the Group is currently being identified for early May at 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 23rd January 2019. Following the success of the 2018 Horseman’s Sunday, a similar event is planned for 28th April 2019. The Revd Stephanie Sokolowski of St Martha’s Church has confirmed her availability for that day. 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 “Be Nice, Say Hi” campaign, which encourages positive communication between various users of the bridleway network. The Group is due to meet again on 3rd April 2019 when the focus will be on Horseman’s Sunday.

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.

4. ENJOYMENT AND UNDERSTANDING

4.1 Website. The Surrey Hills website was reviewed in January by the Collaboration Group. A plan and budget has been set aside to update elements of the website. Google analytics show that the most accessed areas of the site are the recreational elements (walking/cycling/visiting) and therefore any developments need to reflect the public demand for information. A major development will be moving information on the AONB Board to a dedicated area on the main site and creating a Surrey Hills Trust Fund website. A development plan has been agreed to progress this work.

Recent developments include a new My Surrey Hills area of the website www.surreyhills.org/my-surrey-hills/ which features videos created of individuals who live, work in or enjoy visiting the Surrey Hills.

Our Google analytics show that in 2018 on average 16,000 people per month visit the website and in our anniversary month of May we saw over 21,500 people visit the website.

4.2 Google banner. The Surrey Hills was identified as a National Park on Google Maps in 2016. The Surrey Hills has 9,266 reviews (averaging 4.6 out of 5). The Cotswolds has 9,728 reviews (also averaging 4.6 out of 5) and The Chilterns AONB 6,839 (averaging 4.5 out of 5).

4.3 Social Media. Our social media channels continue to play a vital role in spreading the word about the work we do. The ‘Lark Ascending’ video produced for the Symposium event was released to the public via our social media channels and went viral! We had over 60k views and 465 people sharing it on. 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 4565; Facebook 3783; and Instagram 1464.

4.4 My Surrey Hills Campaign. A series of 12 videos focusing on people are currently being produced by Dorking based videographer Markus Dell. All the videos feature people that live, work in or simply enjoy visiting the Surrey Hills. What comes across in each video is how much people love the Surrey Hills. Each month we unveil a new person and their video through our social media channels. So far we have had a runner, forest school leader and landscape photographer profiled. We will continue the series with a cyclist, artist, volunteer, wild swimmer, wildlife enthusiast, horse riders and more. 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.

4.5 PR. The year started off well with 4 pages of coverage on our Surrey Hills Symposium in Surrey Life Magazine and the front cover of The Guide To magazine. Since the last Board meeting stories have been released on; the Surrey Hills Symposium, The future of protected landscapes, new swift tower in Shalford, Cycle Surrey Hills, Horseman’s Sunday

and Surrey Hills Arts. 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

We have scheduled coverage with Surrey Life magazine on our 70th anniversary of protected landscapes campaign and are hoping to get front covers across Archant 'Life' magazine titles in the South East. Vantage Point magazine are also keen to run a photo competition with us this year which they will sponsor.

BBC Countryfile came to film in the Surrey Hills in March. They were keen to focus on the 60th anniversary of the Surrey Wildlife Trust and the link between art and countryside. The programme will feature sculptor Walter Bailey and will show him create his 'Forest Glasshouse' sculpture as part of the Surrey Unearthed programme on Farnham Heath. The programme will air on Sunday 31 March.

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 and Kent Downs AONBs have also signed up. The major transport providers in the South East (South Western, Southern, Great Western, Stagecoach South & East 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. A design agency in Guildford has been commissioned to produce artwork, a microsite and all digital media.

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 East & West divisions of the Girl Guiding Association and uptake has been fantastic. 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. 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 Witley 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 the summer months.

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.

4.10 'House of Invisible Hands' Part of Surrey Unearthed, this is Walter Bailey's permanent sculptural shelter on a viewpoint at Farnham Heath. This is now complete and will feature in Countryfile on Sunday 31 March. Walter will be running workshops with Creative Response and Post 19 towards a mass community temporary artwork.

4.11 Terrain. Jane Ponsford has been travelling across the AONB collecting natural materials and drawing pigments from the bark and berries to include in her paper artworks. Jane is currently exploring the Reigate Hill landscape. She will be leading 60 children from Oxted School through their Arts Award as part of this residency. She will be showing some of these works at Reigate Hill Fort in April with some associated events See <https://www.surreyuneartthed.org/events>

4.12 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 at the end of September. You can view the film of last year’s here: <https://www.surreyuneartthed.org/harvest-box-hill-event>

4.13 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 have just selected proposals for the 3rd Heathland Artworks at RSPB Farnham Heath. Date for your diaries: Thursday 20 June, 5-7pm for the launch.

4.14 Inspiring Views. We are embarking on our next artwork in the Inspiring Views series. Working with the Albury Estate, we hope this will be funded through a crowd funding campaign.

4.15 Surrey Hills Arts Mailing List.

For updates, please sign up to the Surrey Hills Arts mailing list: www.surreyuneartthed.org/mailling-list.