

Date: 12th September 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 Government Review of National Parks. This item was discussed at the AGM. There are officer discussions amongst AONB and National Park staff. It is expected that there will be a formal call for evidence in October.

1.2 The future for food, farming and the environment. On behalf of the AONB Board, the Director has submitted the outline pilot scheme to Test and Trail a new Environmental Land Management Scheme with Surrey University and the Surrey Nature Partnership. At this stage there has been no further progress to report but Defra has indicated that it will confirm schemes in the autumn.

1.3 The Annual Partnership Tour. This took place on Friday 6th July and attended by 30 guests. There were 3 visits to look at issues related to the future of food and farming; rural enterprise; recreation, access and tourism.

1.3.1 Denbies. Chris White of Denbies welcomed guests and gave some background to the Estate highlighting that the hot, dry summer had been excellent for growth. There was an inspirational presentation by David Parkinson, CEO of Wine UK. David highlighted the massive demand for English sparkling wine, a forecast for its growth over the next 20 years and the impact that this could have on the Surrey Hills landscape. At Denbies there was also an update from Wendy on the work that Enterprises is doing on The Trademark and supporting the food and drink sector, including a Surrey Hills Food Festival at Denbies on 14th and 15th September. Nancy Edwards, of The Rutland Group, gave a presentation and showed a video of the Surrey Hills Challenge and the inaugural Surrey Hills Festival of Sport that will also be taking place at Denbies on 23rd September.

1.3.2 Sondes Place Farm. Hugh Broom, Surrey NFU, hosted the next stage. He provided an insight into the farming and, by contrast to David Parkinson, highlighted the pressure on farming given climate change and the drought conditions. Professor Richard Murphy, Director of Sustainability at Surrey University, and Shaun Page, our Farm Cluster facilitator for the North Downs, outlined the Test and Trail bid and the issues related to environmental land management schemes. The visit also included a viewing of Jonathon Parson's Horizon installation which is reported on later.

1.3.3 Manor Farm. Laurence and Paula Matthews hosted lunch. Laurence gave an overview of his farm enterprise, which is the largest on Surrey extending about 4,000 acres over a distance of 20 miles with 12 landlords. There was also discussion on environmental stewardship and Paula gave an introduction to the education visits to the farm, which highlighted the lack of opportunities for young people to learn about food and farming. Kieran Foster of Cycling UK outlined the Cycle Surrey Hills initiatives and the plans to extend it across the Surrey Hills, including hubs at Denbies and at Wotton.

1.4 The 60th Anniversary in 2018. The 60th anniversary of the Surrey Hills being designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) continues to be celebrated with events & projects happening throughout the year. The next major event will be the Surrey University Symposium on 28 November as an evening of 'celebration, inspiration and debate'. This will also be a key opportunity to promote the AONB Management Plan consultation.

1.5 AONB Unit Business Plan (2014 – 2019). The updated business plan will be considered by the Statutory Members Group and presented to the AONB Board meeting in

December. This will include activity relating to the preparation of the new Management Plan (2019 – 2024). In the meantime, the AONB team and project funding will continue to be allocated for the AONB Board Working Groups and Project Groups that have been agreed by the AONB Board.

2. PLANNING

2.1 Local Plans. The Guildford Local Plan Inspector has required the Council to increase the Plan's housing provision in order to accommodate 20% of Woking's unmet housing need in its own Local Plan. The Council is deliberating on this matter. On the same issue a judge has granted the CPRE leave to appeal to the High Court relating to the Waverley Local Plan. For its Local Plan to be found sound, Waverley BC accepted the Inspector's requirement to increase its housing provision to take 50% of Woking's unmet housing needs. The High Court is expected to hear the case in October.

AONB advice has been submitted on behalf of the Board on the Elstead Neighbourhood Plan that proposes a different and larger site for housing than in the Waverley Local Plan Part 2. The AONB advice given was that the sites in the Waverley Local Plan are preferable from an AONB aspect. Otherwise the draft Neighbourhood Plan has been welcomed and supported.

General support has been given on behalf of the Board to the Draft Tandridge Local Plan. Like Guildford and Reigate and Banstead no housing allocations are proposed in the AONB. As the District Council states that the District is the most constrained in the country by the Green Belt, the Plan strikes an appropriate balance that does not meet its full objectively housing needs. But it does propose a new settlement in the Green Belt near South Godstone well away from the AONB to avoid numerous smaller incursions into the Green Belt on the edge of built up areas.

The Reigate and Banstead Development Plan is to be considered by an Inspector at a hearing on 30th October.

2.2 Planning Application Consultations. These consultations are still running at a rate of about 300 a year. In order to co-ordinate with the Unit's main annual report, the Planning annual report will similarly be reported in December.

2.3 Leith Hill Oil and Gas. Michael Gove has taken the decision not to renew the Forestry Commission's lease to Europa Oil and Gas to test drill at Leith Hill. This will mean the current proposal will be withdrawn.

2.4 AONB Boundary Review. Natural England had previously indicated that the boundary review would commence this year. No further information has been received as to the start date.

3. LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION AND ACCESS

3.1 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 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.

3.3 Byways Working Group (Chaired by David Wright). The Group last met on 2nd July 2018. A site visit on Wolvens Lane, to discuss the damage caused by illegal off road use, was carried out by a member of the Byways Working Group, who is a member of Surrey Green Lane Association (GLASS), a member of the SCC Countryside Access Team and a representative from the Wotton Estate. They concluded that a great deal could be achieved fairly easily and it is hoped that the work will have been carried out by the time the Group next meets in October, after which stumping will take place. Funding has been secured to carry out this work through GLASS, the Wotton Estate and the Byways Working Group. The Forestry Commission representative on the Group has indicated that they plan to “target harden” all their land adjacent to Wolvens Lane through a range of methods including the use of large rocks, and are currently awaiting funding approval before putting together a tender and contract to get the work carried out. 70% of the updated “Byway Open to All Traffic” signs have now been installed by volunteer members of the Trail Riders Fellowship. The remaining signs cannot be installed until missing posts have been replaced by SCC Highways. The Group is due to meet again on 8th October 2018.

3.4 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 is about responsibilities for establishing and maintaining this network. A proposal is being developed with landowners, volunteers, the Surrey Hills Society and the Surrey Hills Trust Fund to adopt and inspect the trails. There is also discussion around establishing a Surrey Hills Access Fund. This will be discussed at the next Working Group and reported back to the AONB Board.

3.5 Cycle Surrey Hills. Working with Cycling UK, we have implemented 80km (50 miles) of off-road cycle trails in South West Surrey with funding from the London Marathon Charitable Trust Fund. The new network was officially launched by Jeremy Hunt, MP at the Devil’s Punchbowl on Friday 8 June. The hope with this project is that it will roll out across the Surrey Hills providing a continuous linked cycle network across the whole AONB. Surrey CC Countryside Access team has submitted a bid to Coast to Capital to promote rural tourism and it is planned to integrate Cycle Surrey Hills into this programme.

3.6 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 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. Two projects being discussed are at Coldharbour and Hombury. This may also be an opportunity for the Surrey Hills Trust Fund to support high profile community projects.

3.6.1 Sign de-clutter. In the meantime. Liz Cutter is undertaking sign audits, following the guidance agreed by Surrey County Council and best practice, to identify signs to be removed. This process is taking longer than expected due to the need to get sign off by Highways and the decision to consult with parish councils. The aim is to have a photo

opportunity with Colin Kemp, SCC Lead Cabinet Member for Place, with a pile of signs that have been removed from the Surrey Hills.

3.7 Equestrian Working Group: The Group last met on 27th June 2018. A review of the Horseman's Sunday held on 22nd 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 14th 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. The trails will be waymarked in a similar way to the cycle routes. Further trails are currently being identified by members of the group. Parking suitable for horse boxes is marked on the trail maps, although height barriers on many car parks prevent horse boxes from accessing them. A further bridleway clearance day is being planned, together with the mountain biking community. Relationships between horse riders and the mountain bike community are much improved and should be further improved by the introduction of the British Horse Society's "Be Nice, Say Hi" campaign, which encourages positive communication between various users of the bridleway network. The Group is due to meet again on 10th October 2018.

3.8 North Downs Way National Trail. The Trail Partnership has an active programme this year as part of its 40th 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" for walkers to explore along the route. "Ales of the Trail" will be launched with a Beer Festival at The Tickled Trout on 29th & 30th 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.

3.9 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. The posters are now complete and will be launched on 31 October at Chilworth station with the North Downs line steering group chaired by Mike Goodman.

1.4 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. It is a community archaeology project being led by Dr Anne Sassin in partnership with the Surrey Archaeological Society. It is proposed to undertake research with the community, particularly young people, to better understand how medieval settlements were created, developed and ultimately how our landscape has transformed since that time. The project will provide a range of workshops in practical skills (e.g. map study, LiDAR, survey, excavation), acting as a catalyst for further community research and engagement through an extensive outreach programme of walks, tours, exhibitions, reconstructions and re-enactments of the period. It is planned to submit the bid by the end of the year.

4. ENJOYMENT AND UNDERSTANDING

4.1 Surrey Unearthed. The Surrey Unearthed programme is progressing well and the Surrey Unearthed Exhibition in July at Leith Hill Place, which included talks and workshops and brought together the 10 projects, received great feedback. Many of the projects having taken place or soon to be realised. These include:

4.1.1 Fossil Ocean Floor. This installation in farmland adjacent to the North Downs Line, west of Dorking was visited as part of the AONB Annual Tour. It can be viewed from the train, the carriage road at Ranmore Common and the footpath across Milton Court Farm. Members are all invited to a talk by the artist and picnic in the field at 1.30pm on Saturday 15 September.

4.1.2 Harvest. Mary Branson is installing her large-scale installation in the lower field at Box Hill Farm. Her illuminated outlines of hay bales can be seen from dusk to 10pm each Saturday and Sunday evenings from 15 – 23 September with artist-led guided walks. There will be a community celebration of the Surrey Hills on Box Hill Viewpoint on Saturday 29 September, 6.30pm. This will include hand-held lanterns made in the workshops, singing of traditional harvest songs and a Calling event led by Artist Alison Carlier.

4.1.3 Terrain. Jane Ponsford has completed her residency at Box Hill which included creating artworks using the natural materials of the location, a window display in the National Trust information centre and a day of papermaking which was fully booked. During September and October, Jane will be exploring two locations – Witley Common and Newlands Corner. This will result in a large-scale piece at Witley and a display inside the visitor centre and Newlands Corner. Members are all welcome to participate in drawing activities with Jane at the viewpoint at Newlands Corner on Sunday 7 October as part of the national Big Draw programme.

4.1.4 From Humble Beginnings. Steven Edwards has just installed this artwork in the Limnerslease Woods at the Watts Gallery, Compton. The artwork is a response to the local use of clay throughout history as a building material. Steve will be running workshops as part of the Make Festival on Saturday 22 and Sunday 23 September as well as running workshops with a group from Halow, a charity supporting young adults with learning disabilities in Guildford.

4.1.5 Arts Award. 6 school groups are taking their Arts Award qualification as part of this project. Jonathan Parsons has worked with a Spelthorne & Leatherhead school, Mary Branson is working with a Woking and Guildford School this month and Jane Ponsford is working with a group of excluded children in Waverley this month and a Tandridge School next year.

4.1.6 For information on all 10 projects and upcoming events, talks, walks and workshops, please visit www.surreyunearthed.org. For updates, please sign up to the Surrey Hills Arts mailing list: www.surreyunearthed.org/mailling-list.

4.2 Heathland Artworks. 21 June-29 October. 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. The artworks are currently being installed and the work will be exhibited throughout summer ending in October to coincide with Farnham's Craft month.

4.1 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. Plans are also being discussed to establish a separate micro-site for the Surrey Hills Board later in the year to coincide with the Management Plan consultation.

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 7,575 reviews (averaging 4.6 out of 5), with only 4 National Parks having a higher number of reviews.

4.3 Social Media. Our social media channels continue to play a vital role in spreading the word about the work we do. Recent stories that have generated increased interest in the Surrey Hills include the forthcoming Festival of Sport and the repair of the inspiring views bench 'contour' which had been vandalised. 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 4214; Facebook 2954; and Instagram 1227.

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 anniversary event at Loseley Park, Surrey Hills travel campaign, Surrey Hills Festival of Sport, Heathland Artworks, Surrey Unearthed projects and more. With all receiving a good level of coverage locally.

Surrey Life magazine continue to be our media partner, supporting the Surrey Hills through regular coverage.

Vantage Point magazine used our Surrey Hills limited edition prints for front covers across 5 of their editions in August. The publication also featured an article about 60 places to visit in the Surrey Hills, helping to raise awareness of our anniversary.

4.5 Drone footage of the Surrey Hills. Our drone footage is almost complete with Reigate Hill being the remaining site to capture. From the Air, a drone filming company have already taken footage of Frensham Ponds, Devil's Punch Bowl, Newlands Corner, Leith Hill and Box Hill. The footage will feature autumnal, winter and spring shots. Caroline is working with Trinity Mirror to release the footage onto 'Surrey Live' in the coming months. The footage will also be used to create a video for the Surrey University Symposium in November.

4.6 Bus & Rail Providers Collaboration. The travel campaign continues to run with South Western Railway, Great Western Railway, Southern, Metrobus and Compass Travel. Posters and postcards can be spotted at stations across these networks. We have had a surge in interest to our 'Days out in the Surrey Hills' web section so we can monitor the effectiveness of the campaign. Through our relationship with Metrobus we secured the back of two double decker buses which are now adorned with our anniversary artwork and can be seen around East Surrey.

4.7 Girl Guiding Surrey. Thanks to Stella Cantor of the Surrey Hills Society we are collaborating with Girl Guiding Surrey to produce a guide badge and educational resource pack. The badge has now been signed off and will be promoted to guiding groups throughout Surrey during September. The aim of this work is to raise awareness of the Surrey Hills amongst a younger audience. It is also hoped that we will be able to roll out what we have created to Scouting groups.