

**Date:** 13<sup>th</sup> June 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:

- 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 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. PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION**

**1.1 The 25 Year Environment Plan.** In January 2018 the Government published a 25-Year Plan for the Environment. It set out an approach to protect landscapes and habitats in England and committed to undertaking a Review of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). The Review will consider National Parks and AONBs in England, including the role of these areas in relation to other places designated for environmental purposes. Landscapes in Wales and Scotland are under devolved administrations and therefore do not fall under the scope of this Review.

**1.2 Government Review of National Parks.** The Review will be led by Julian Glover, Guardian journalist and former speech writer for David Cameron, and supported by an advisory group. In the context of meeting both local and national priorities and wider environmental governance, the Review will examine and make recommendations on:

- The existing statutory purposes for National Parks and AONBs and how effectively they are being met
- The alignment of these purposes with the goals set out in the 25-Year Plan for the Environment
- The case for extension or creation of new designated areas
- How to improve individual and collective governance of National Parks and AONBs, and how that governance interacts with other national assets
- The financing of National Parks and AONBs
- How to enhance the environment and biodiversity in existing designations
- How to build on the existing eight-point plan for National Parks and to connect more people with the natural environment from all sections of society and improve health and wellbeing
- How well National Parks and AONBs support communities

The Review will draw on existing evidence and that submitted by interested groups and individuals during the course of the Review, and will also visit people and places in a range of designated landscapes. This is a cross-Government Review, with Defra providing the secretariat and appointing a lead to undertake the Review. Recommendations will be made to the Government. Implementation will be led by the Defra Secretary of State. The Review will report in 2019 (the 70th Anniversary of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act).

**1.3 The future for food, farming and the environment.** On behalf of the AONB Board, the Director responded to the Defra Health and Harmony consultation on the future of food, farming and the environment and attended a workshop in Kent. The big issue is the viability of farms in Surrey with the proposed reductions in, and phasing out of, the Basic Payment Scheme. This was an opportunity to submit the outline pilot scheme for the New Environmental Land Management Scheme with Surrey University that was agreed at the last AONB Board meeting. At this stage there has been no further progress to report.

**1.4 Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Into the Hills.** The AONB Director submitted a response to the consultation on HLF's role, vision and funding priorities for the next five years. Unfortunately the Into the Hills did not get a grant award. In short feedback was that as it was focused on young people, it would have been better to go through the Young Roots programme. This was the original intention but young people did not actually design the scheme, and our proposed 'Youth Partner' was Surrey Youth Focus which does not work directly with young people. There was not a specific heritage focus on, or a strong enough demonstration of, 'heritage at risk' and that the project would have reduced or mitigated that risk. From others feedback. HLF does not like projects that rely too heavily on a Project Officer, particularly when they make up the majority cost, as they want to support volunteer effort as this is more likely to be sustained. Discussions are taking place with the Anne Sassin and Surrey Archaeological Society about incorporating the project into a Forgotten Landscapes bid later in the year.

**1.5 The 60th Anniversary in 2018.** The 60<sup>th</sup> 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.

- A successful Civic Reception took place at Speakers House, Houses of Parliament on 8 May. The event was sponsored by the Kier Group and well attended including Lord Gardiner of Kimble, Minister for Rural Affairs, Michael More-Molyneux, the Lord Lieutenant of Surrey, Anne Milton MP and more.
- The History of the Surrey Hills booklet has now been published and officially launched. The booklet funded by a Your Heritage lottery grant and written by Ken Bare from the Surrey Hills Society has been well received.
- The 6 anniversary limited edition prints created by artist Louise Dunckley are selling well. £5 for the sale of every print goes to the Surrey Hills Trust Fund. To date over 200 prints have been sold.
- Posters & a new web section have been created for a travel Campaign with rail and bus operators. Posters are currently on display at South Western, Great Western and Southern Railway stations across their networks. MetroBus have vinyl wrapped the back of two double deckers to promote the campaign which will be launched on the morning of 13 June. 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.
- A special Surrey Hills edition of Surrey Life magazine was produced in May with two front covers in circulation.
- Michael More-Molyneux will host an event to celebrate the Surrey Hills Society at Loseley Park on 26 June which will be attended by Surrey Hills Patron, Penelope Keith DBE.
- A series of Surrey Unearthed events will take place throughout 2018, delivered by Surrey Hills Arts to help raise awareness of the anniversary.
- Surrey University Symposium is being planned for 24<sup>th</sup> November at Surrey University. This will be a celebration of the Surrey Hills and debating the vision for the next 60 years. A working group is developing the detail, which may progress as an annual event. Max Lu, the Vice Chancellor, will be hosting a post-dinner event for speakers and civic guests.

## **2. PLANNING**

**2.1 Local Plans.** Since the previous report to the Board Waverley BC has published its Waverley Local Plan Part 2 that is an amplification of its Local Plan Part 1. It identifies the housing sites to meet the proposed housing provision established within Local Plan Part 1. Discussions are to take place with Waverley Officers as about 618 dwellings are proposed on green field sites in the Surrey Hills AONB mainly at Milford, Haslemere and Elstead.

A decision is expected shortly as to whether leave to appeal is to be granted to the 3 High Court legal challenges to Local Plan Part1. The CPRE and Protect our Waverley (PoW) include challenges on AONB grounds. Hearings into the Guildford Local Plan are commencing in the week commencing 11<sup>th</sup> June. The Board is not being represented because the Local Plan makes no housing allocations in the AONB and the AONB policy in the Plan is considered to be appropriate.

**2.2 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.

**3.2 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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.

**3.3 Byways Working Group (Chaired by David Wright).** The Group last met on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2018. Mike Nash, SCC Partnership & Intelligence Officer, reported that the police were 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 Wotton Estate reported ongoing problems of illegal off road use on Wolvens Lane. To attempt to resolve this issue a member of the Byways Working Group, who is a member of Surrey Green Lane Association, together with members of the SCC Countryside Access Team and a representative from the Wotton Estate, met on site and are planning measures which will be put in place in an attempt to prevent this illegal use. 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 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2018.

**3.4 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 developed with landowners, volunteers, the Surrey Hills Society and the Surrey Hills Trust Fund to adopt and inspect the trails. Charles Russell Speechlys is providing pro-bono legal advice on the access agreements.

**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.

**3.6 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. A Rural Traffic Management & HGV workshop was held on 11 April at Shalford Village Hall. The invitation to the workshop was extended to Local Committee Members and other Parish Councils not currently on the Working Group. The workshop included a presentation by Jason Russell, Deputy Director Environment and Infrastructure, on SCC's Rural Traffic Policy and Highways Budgets, and the launch of the De-clutter the Surrey Hills campaign by Colin Kemp, Cabinet Member for Highways, which will be led by Liz Cutter, as part of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The 60 participants undertook a swot analysis of the HGV issues facing the Surrey Hills and opportunities to mitigate them. The workshop also profiled the Broadband for Surrey Hills (B4SH) initiative.

**3.7 Equestrian Working Group:** The Group last met on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2018. Jane Garrett and Maggie Scott, members of the Group, have now resumed their identification of new equestrian trails 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.

The "Horseman's Sunday" event which was held at St Martha's Church on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> April as part of the Surrey Hills 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations was a great success. Between 30 and 35 horses took part and the Revd. Stephanie Sokolowski, vicar at St Martha's, conducted a short service after which she blessed the horses and presented them with a special 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary rosette. A further bridleway clearance day is planned for later in the year. The next meeting of the Group will be held on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> June 2018.

**3.8 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 attended a study tour in Spain to look at how to improve NDW experience.

**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 near sign-off stage and will be launched in the coming months with the North Downs line steering group chaired by Mike Goodman.

**3.10 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.

**3.11 Woodland Trust National Commemorative Woodland, Langley Vale.** The AONB Director is the independent chair for the Langley Vale Open Spaces Advisory Group that 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.** The home page of the Surrey Hills website is being updated to make it easier to navigate through the whole site. A revolving banner image will feature at the top of the site, and recreation opportunities, events and local food and drink will feature heavily. The Surrey Hills Enterprises area of the site has been refreshed to benefit members including a new members' directory. 60 places to see in the Surrey Hills has added a new element to the site and is being well accessed. Options are still 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 later in the year.

**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 6,655 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 Horseman's Sunday event and the Speaker's House event. 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 4053; Facebook 2826; and Instagram 1144.

**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](http://www.surreyhills.org/news). Since the last Board meeting stories have been released on; the Horseman's Sunday event at St Martha's, the history of the Surrey Hills, The limited edition Surrey Hills Prints, the House of Commons celebration event, the Surrey Unearthed Lark Descending exhibition and the launch of Cycle Surrey Hills with Jeremy Hunt MP. With all receiving a good level of coverage locally.

Surrey Life magazine produced a special 'Surrey Hills' themed May edition which included 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 two collectable front cover's featuring the Surrey Hills prints. For those who didn't receive a copy please contact Caroline who has a few spares available.

Vantage Point magazine will be doing a special feature on the Surrey Hills in their August edition including a special cover and Surrey Matters are currently running a story on the Surrey Hills in their June edition.

**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 Punch Bowl, Newlands Corner, Leith Hill, Box Hill and Reigate Hill. The footage will feature autumnal, winter and spring shots and there has been lots of interest from the local press to feature the footage digitally.

**4.6 Bus & Rail Providers Collaboration.** Caroline is working with South Western Railway, Great Western Railway, Southern, MetroBus and Compass Travel through the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary travel campaign as mentioned above.

**4.7 Girl Guiding Surrey.** The opportunity has arisen in partnership with the Surrey Hills Society to create a special Surrey Hills badge for Girl Guiding Surrey. Caroline is currently working with Stella Cantor from the Society to create the badge and an information pack. The badge will be promoted to guiding groups throughout Surrey with the aim of raising awareness of the Surrey Hills amongst a younger audience.