

**Date:** 4th December 2019  
**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:

- Advocacy, Partnership and Coordination
- 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.

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Background papers: Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan 2014 - 2019

Attached:

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## **1. ADVOCACY, PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION**

**1.1 National Association for AONBs (NAAONB).** The AONB Director will be attending the National Association of AONB Chairs' meeting and AGM in Westminster on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> November. The focus will be on considering the Glover Review but, due to Purdah, there will be no Ministerial address.

**1.2 NAAONB Taking the Lead.** Rob Fairbanks and Ali Clarke are representing the Surrey Hills AONB on this national programme funded by the National Heritage Lottery Fund. The aim is to increase learning and collaboration between AONBs and National Parks. 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.

**1.3 Surrey University Symposium.** Another sold out event, with over 400 bookings, was the Surrey Hills Symposium on 27<sup>th</sup> November. The theme was the Natural Health Service. The Key Note speaker is Dr William Bird and it will profile some of the collaborative research with the University on Living Environments for Healthy Ageing and restoring young minds in the Surrey Hills. Bridget Biddell, the High Sheriff, will close the event with her theme of Nurture through Surrey's Nature. In principle, the planned theme for 2020 is nature recovery in the Surrey Hills linking to the research on the Environmental Land Management Service.

**1.4 Surrey Hills Affordable Housing Seminar.** The English Rural Housing Association organized a seminar for Parish Councils and Local Authorities on 24<sup>th</sup> September at Denbies Wine Estate. The event raised awareness of the need for affordable housing and the issues to do with its provision. Clive Smith highlighted the planning issues related to provision in the AONB and highlighted best practice.

**1.5 Community Forum.** In association with the Surrey Association of Local Councils (SALC), the first Surrey Hills Community Forum was held on 8<sup>th</sup> November at the Burford Bridge Hotel, Box Hill. Liz Cutter welcomed guests; Rob Fairbanks provided an overview of the AONB; Clive Smith an update on planning issues; and John Evans outlined the Dark Skies Matter campaign. This was followed by a question time session chaired by Trevor Leggo, Chief Executive of SALC. Feedback has been very positive. This will inform the plans for next year's event.

**1.6 Family Collaboration Planning.** Another session is being planned on 23<sup>rd</sup> January at High Ashurst to bring together the family to celebrate success, build trusting relationships and identify opportunities for further collaboration in 2020. This will be a morning and lunchtime session and all Members of the AONB Board are invited to attend.

**1.7 AONB Unit Business Plan.** The new AONB Unit business plan will be presented to the next AONB Board meeting in March. It is anticipated that by this time the funding settlement with Defra will be confirmed as well as the key performance indicators that the unit will need to report.

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

**2.1 Environmental Design Guidelines.** Following the last AONB Board meeting, the draft highway protocol was published as environmental design guidelines for country lanes and villages. This was launched at the Community Forum on 8<sup>th</sup> November. Until such

time that there is staff resource and a clear Surrey County Council sign off for schemes, the Highways Working Group has been put on hold. In the meantime, discussions continue with colleagues in Surrey County Council about how such a programme could be taken forward as a major transport scheme with Local Enterprise Partnerships.

**2.2 Environmental Land Management Scheme.** 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. This is paying for Lantern to provide the project coordination. O.S. will be providing in-kind support by providing land use data and maps across the Surrey Hills, and O2 and Telefonica will provide big data insights into the number and profile of visitors to the Surrey Hills. The proposal is to research and co-design (with farmers) a strategic, landscape scale approach to targeting payments for natural capital (environment and amenity). 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. Hugh Broom has agreed to chair the group and to report to the AONB Board as the NFU representative.

**2.3 Farm Clusters – South West Surrey.** 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. Following a meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> September for landowners and farmers in south west Surrey, around the Wealden Heath SPA, a further bid was submitted to Natural England for a new cluster. If successful, this will provide extensive coverage of the Surrey Hills AONB through clusters, which could be a key landscape scale delivery vehicle for the government's Environmental Land Management System.

**2.4 Viticulture.** 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. The Vineyards of the Surrey Hills consortium was launched in June. For more information see: <https://www.surreyhillsvineyards.co.uk>.

**2.5 Byways Working Group, Chaired by Hazel Watson:.** The Group last met on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2019. The meeting included an update from Surrey Police on the very successful Off Road Engagement day which was held in May to educate members of the public on responsible use of byways in the Surrey Hills. There were also two very interesting and informative presentations, the first by Rob Hewer of the National Trust on the work of the Mole Valley Against Fly Tipping Group and the second by Jackie Lees-Howes, Fly-tipping Reduction Manager, Joint Waste Solutions, on the measures Surrey Environment Partnership (SEP) is taking to tackle the problem of fly-tipping in the county. The Group is next due to meet on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2020.

**2.6 Cycle Surrey Hills.** Following the launch of the campaign with Jenny Seagrove, Cycling UK and BHS, we are working with volunteers on updating the way-marking with "Be Nice, Say Hi". Haslemere Station is also being developed as a gateway with Trusty The Cow being recommissioned and repainted by Louise Duncley to be sited outside the station in September. There is a change of strategy in terms of not way-marking single track trails but trying to encourage cyclists to seek appropriate skills training and guiding to reduce the liability on landowners.

**2.7 Box Hill to Leith Hill Trail.** A bid has been submitted to Coast to Capital LEP for a multi-user trail that will link proposed cycle hubs at Denbies and the Surrey Hills Business Park, Wotton. The majority of the funding will go into surface improvements, including opening up a new stretch through the vineyard and improvements to Wolven's Lane. We should find out the outcome in the New Year.

**2.8 North Downs Way National Trail.** The Kent Downs AONB, and partners, have received major funding for an EU INTERREG project, 'Experience', that is to develop year round visitor experiences. Surrey University will be undertaking the monitoring and evaluation, and Cycling UK will be developing off-road cycle experiences. The funding should also support the development of the Inspiring Views programme along the North Downs Way.

**2.9 Equestrian Working Group.** The Group last met on 5 September 2019. To date eleven equestrian trails have been identified and ridden by members of the Group and are available to download from the equestrian section of the Surrey Hills website. Surrey Hills "Horse Ride" waymarkers have been produced. These are being installed on the trails, together with the "Be Nice, Say Hi" campaign stickers. This campaign encourages positive communication between various users of the bridleway network. Some work, identified by the Group, has been carried out on Leith Hill, including the repair of gates and bridges and removal of overhanging branches. The Group is next due to meet on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

**2.10 Destination Management Organisation.** As reported under Surrey Hills Enterprises, we have been requested by the local authorities in east Surrey to establish a destination management organization (DMO) to help manage visitors to the Surrey Hills. This will bring together countryside access and transport providers as a potential new working group that the AONB unit will administer.

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

**3.1 Website.** A new more functional Board website is about to be launched. We encourage members to visit the site [www.surreyhillsboard.org](http://www.surreyhillsboard.org) to view Board agendas and notes of meetings. The main [surreyhills.org](http://surreyhills.org) will undergo development in 2020 to include new 'Stay' and 'Food and Drink' section. The aim is to make the website easier to navigate and to profile experiences and Surrey Hills Enterprises members across the website.

In 2019 our Google analytics show a substantial increase in visitors to the website. On average from January to November the site has received 21,208 visitors per month compared to 16,500 per month in 2018.

**3.2 Google banner.** The Surrey Hills was identified as a National Park on Google Maps in 2016. The Surrey Hills has 12,581 reviews (averaging 4.7 out of 5 stars). The Cotswolds has 13,312 reviews (4.6 out of 5) and The Chilterns AONB 9,225 (4.5 out of 5). The Google banner offers an excellent way to drive traffic to the Surrey Hills website.

**3.3 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 along with paid for advertising. 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** 5108 (an increase of 224 since last Board meeting); **Facebook** 4601 (an increase of 231); **Instagram** 1854 (an increase of 133).

**3.4 My Surrey Hills Campaign.** Our *My Surrey Hills* series of videos are almost complete. Each month since January a new video has been released via our social media channels. Each video features people who live, work in or simply enjoy visiting the Surrey Hills. 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. A compilation of all the videos will be premiered at the Surrey Hills Symposium in November. One final video will be released in December focusing on dark skies. Please visit [www.surreyhills.org/my-surrey-hills/](http://www.surreyhills.org/my-surrey-hills/) to view all the videos.

**3.5 PR.** Since the last Board meeting press releases have been written on the National Association of AONBs National Moment, Into the Surrey Hills Girl Guiding badge, National Landscapes Review and the New Environmental Design Guide. 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).

**3.6 70 years of protected landscapes.** 2019 marks 70 years since Government passed an Act of Parliament to establish National Parks and AONBs. A campaign to celebrate the protected landscapes of the South East was launched in mid-July and continues to be visible across bus and rail networks. Led by the Surrey Hills AONB and South Downs National Park, the campaign engaged the major transport providers in the South East (South Western, Southern, Great Western, South Eastern, Stagecoach South & East, Brighton & Hove, Metrobus and Gatwick airport) all of whom are supported the campaign through their marketing collateral and digital media. Visit [www.going-outout.co.uk](http://www.going-outout.co.uk) for further details.

**3.7 Girl Guiding Surrey.** A further PR push to local media has helped to raise awareness of this initiative and boosted badge sales. 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 800 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.

**3.8 Community Rail Partnerships** The Surrey Hills to South Downs Community Rail Partnership, which covers the stations on the South Western Railway line between Guildford and Haslemere was officially launched at the beginning of October. One of the original Cow Parade Surrey cows sponsored by Neil Maltby has been re-painted with scenes of the Devil's Punch Bowl and positioned outside Haslemere Station to help raise awareness of the Surrey Hills. The partnership 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.

**3.9 Unearthing Landscapes Symposium.** We had a packed auditorium on 10 October at the University for the Creative Arts in Farnham for the Unearthing Landscapes symposium. Speakers from around the country including Forestry England, Trust New Art, Activate and artists from our own programme all shared examples and knowledge on connecting people to the landscape through the arts. 160 people attended and we've had such positive feedback that the Advisory group are discussing whether to make this annual.

**3.10 Harvest 2019 – One Moon.** Harvest is a community celebration of our outstanding landscape at Box Hill. This was the second Harvest event and was held on 28th September at 7pm. Despite the rain this was a magical evening of art, poetry and music. A special moment was the outcome of the participating choirs with I Speak Music (Surrey's displaced musicians) and UP! Orchestra (of unlimited potential). Together they played and sang a beautiful Syrian

song which perfectly captured the spirit of togetherness under one moon. You can watch the short film here: <https://youtu.be/cEaBsUtz8WI>

**3.11 Inspiring Views.** We are delighted to announce the success of our ‘Inspiring Views’ crowd funding campaign. Working with the Albury Estate, we are now able to commission artist Will Nash to create the ‘Optohedron’ sculpture and seat on the North Downs Way National Trail near Newlands Corner. The project includes access improvements, open habitat restoration and an educational outreach programme.

**3.12 New Chair for Surrey Hills Arts.** We are delighted to have welcomed Alistair Burtenshaw as our new Chair. Alistair is Director of Watts Gallery and formerly Director of the Charleston Trust. Perdita Hunt OBE finished her chairmanship with closing remarks at the Unearthing Landscapes symposium.

**3.13 Surrey Unearthed.** The Surrey Unearthed programme has now come to an end. A summary report of the programme is available. Email [surreyhillsarts@gmail.com](mailto:surreyhillsarts@gmail.com)