**Item 9**

##### AONB

**Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Board**

7 September 2022

**Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan Monitoring Report**

**Purpose of the report:**

To update Members on the activities related to the implementation of the Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan (2020 – 2025)

**Recommendations:**

It is recommended that:

1. Members note the activities of the Surrey Hills Family and partners in delivering the AONB Management Plan (2020 – 2025)

**Introduction:**

1. Although the fundamental purpose of the Management Plan will be to encourage co-ordinated action by all organisations, agencies and individuals, the Surrey Hills AONB Board has established a Surrey Hills group of organisations (the Surrey Hills Family) to help support the delivery of the AONB Management Plan’s Vision:

***The Surrey Hills is recognised as a national asset in which its natural and cultural assets are managed in an attractive landscape mosaic of farmland, woodland, heaths, downs, and commons. It provides opportunities for business enterprise and for all to enjoy and appreciate its natural beauty for their health and well-being.***

1. This report provides an overview on progress under the following Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan pillars:

* Planning
* Landscape Conservation and Enhancement
* Access, Enjoyment and Understanding
* Growing the Surrey Hills Economy
* Advocacy. Partnership and Coordination

1. The Surrey Hills Family framework (Appendix 1) is work in progress to monitor the delivery. This will be reported to the AONB Board and reviewed by Surrey Hills Chairs’ Group.

**Planning**

1. **Surrey Hills Expansion Project.** Natural England will be reporting progress under item 6.
2. **Rural Traffic Management.** Surrey County Council is taking a strategic approach to area wide speed management across the Surrey Hills with area speed limits of 20, 30 and 40 mph are being implemented in the area between Dorking, Guildford and Cranleigh. Implicit in the measures is to promote and reinforce the character of the rural area including the opportunity for repeater signs to be mounted on oak posts. This offers a potentially tremendous benefit to the Surrey Hills which could be expanded across south-west Surrey in future years.

**Landscape Conservation and Enhancement**

1. **Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) – Surrey Hills Fund**. The budget for 2022/23 is £279,000. Proposals in the pipeline include looking at having a small-delegated fund for parish councils and community groups, and collaborative bids for ponds, access and water vole habitat improvements as well as more hedge planting schemes. There are 7 projects already agreed including:

* facilities for outdoor education centre for young people near Haslemere
* a farm trailer and facilities for farm visits/education near Dorking
* on-farm access improvements
* rainwater harvesting to enable conservation grazing in a remote site
* equipment to better manage chalk grassland by the Surrey Countryside Partnership
* a mentoring project to promote regenerative farming through the Pasture Fed Livestock Association

1. **Environmental Land Management Adviser.** Interviews for the new Environmental Land Management Adviser post will take place in September. This is a fixed term 2-year contract to support the delivery of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Surrey. It will also support the 3 cluster schemes (North Downs, Greenscapes, and West Surrey Greensands) as the Defra funding will be ending in 22/23.
2. **Heathland Connections – Nature Recovery Project.** Natural England is investing circa £400k into the Wealden Heath Special Protection Area in the Surrey Hills to restore and connect the heathland landscapes around Thursley National Nature Reserve. The funding will cover a full-time senior and a project budget until March 2025. Natural England is also supporting Big Chalk, which is a regional project led by the Protected Landscapes to restore downland landscapes and habitats
3. **Conservation Volunteers**. The Surrey Hills Society’s Volunteer and Projects Coordinator, Christa Emmett, has been helping to coordinate a wide variety of corporate, community group and developing volunteers under a Conservation Volunteer programme. Training had taken place with Surrey Countryside Access team on monitoring public rights of way and with the Association of Trail Builders on the monitoring and maintenance of mountain bike trails which is an opportunity for volunteers to manage the Summer Lightning trail at Leith Hill. Christa is coordinating work with various groups including Surrey Choices and National Highways, and is supporting a young wheelchair intern ranger with Surrey Wildlife Trust.

**Access, Enjoyment and Understanding**

1. **Summer Travel Campaign.** Denbies hosted a launch event for the campaign on 12 July. This included the re-launch of the Mole Gap Trail, a walk linking Leatherhead to Dorking stations refreshed with signs installed on existing gates and posts to help waymark and to highlight important flora, fauna and points of interest along the way with links to our new website. This was principally funded by Mole Valley DC’s Welcome Back Fund.
2. **Countryside Code.** The Countryside Code campaign is a collaboration with Surrey County Council’s Countryside Visitor Services team. It aims to make the code more accessible for the public to follow, sharing positive messaging to educate the public on the particular challenges we face in the Surrey countryside. This campaign includes six 30 second videos from various community groups; farmers, walkers, cyclists, horse riders, fire & rescue and access managers. They will share their stories and give a friendly face to the reasons why we must practice good behaviour in the countryside. The deliverables include the videos on Instagram Reels, sharing uploads onto websites and on-site posters that will be available to parish councils and land managers.
3. **Surrey Hills Website.** The new website will be previewed to the Surrey Hills Partnership after the Surrey Hills AONB Board meeting on 7September. This a major opportunity to refresh the brand and to demonstrate greater diversity and inclusivity as a National Landscape, to promote sustainable travel and to profile our Surrey Hills Enterprises businesses.
4. **Making Space for Nature.** On Thursday 25 August, partners were invited to a private view at Leith Hill Place of the illustrations of the 30 Surrey Hills indicator species. These were created by an ‘Our Time’ artist at HMP Send, taking part in a programme delivered by Watts Gallery Trust and funded by the Michael Varah Memorial Fund and the Surrey Hills Trust Fund. The event was sponsored by Silent Pool Distillery who created a special Skylark cocktail for the evening as part of the 150th anniversary of Vaughn Williams and The Lark Ascending. There was also a talk by writer and broadcaster Andrew Green and a special showing of an inspirational new film commissioned with the National Trust. The evening was a great success with 21 of the illustrations being sold with proceeds going towards a nature recovery project with the National Trust at Box Hill.
5. **Nature Connections in the Surrey Hills**. This is a partnership withNatural England to help connect people with nature. The project has supported further health and wellbeing project with the Big Leaf Foundation (refugee and displaced people), the Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum (SMEF), Surrey Asian Women’s Network, the Amber Foundation (young homeless and a Guildford charity supporting the young LGBTQIA. This will be profiled at our Surrey University Symposium in November.
6. **Habitat.** Artists and ecologists have come together to develop a creative eco space on campus at the University of Surrey. This pilot project is funded by Arts Council England and involves the creation of sculptural habitats to support specific declining species. These were launched in July. The artists have engaged 400 people directly teaching them about local species and creating sculptural habitats. 11-13 yr olds were a large proportion of those engaged in addition to the elderly and people with learning disabilities.
7. **Inspiring Views**: Artist duo Instar are creating the next ‘Inspiring Views’ seating on Titsey Estate in East Surrey. They are sourcing stone from the Titsey quarry and creating a circular area for walkers to rest on the North Downs Way. This is due to be launched on 2 November.
8. **Heathland Artworks**: On 28 June, the annual art trail at RSPB Farnham Heath was launched. It features temporary artworks by BA and MA students from the University for the Creative Arts who have been inspired by the history and geology of the heath. The trail will be in place until the end of October.
9. **Harvest**. We will be celebrating the Surrey Hills landscape through this community arts event at Box Hill on 17 September at dusk. The Harvest event, in partnership with the National Trust and Mole Valley District Council, will include singing, percussion, art installation and poetry. This year the theme is Nature Connections between people and nature. Artist Diana Burch is leading workshops with targeted groups which will all contribute to a striking `Seeds of Hope` installation on Donkey Green that will have been created by hundreds of local people. The day will also include an organised walk by Active Inclusion, a Muslim hiking group, that will be undertaking the 10-mile Box Hill hike, including prayers at High Ashurst and a torchlight procession back down the Zig Zag after Harvest.
10. **Social Media.** The Surrey Hills family continue to use their individual social media channels to share information about all aspects of their work. We encourage you to engage with us on social media.

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| **Family Member** | **Facebook** | **Twitter** | **Instagram** |
| Surrey Hills AONB | 8,687 | 6,531 | 4,329 |
| Surrey Hills Enterprises | 1,619 | N/a | 3,814 |
| Surrey Hills Society | 562 | 747 | 1,665 |
| Surrey Hills Arts | N/a | N/a | 3,385 |
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| **Growing the Surrey Hills Economy** |

1. **Membership, Awards and Anniversary.** The historic Fetcham Park House hosted the 10th Anniversary of Surrey Hills Enterprises on Tuesday 21 June. This was a celebration of all the wonderful businesses and corporate supporters and their commitment to collaboration, passion for the Surrey Hills and environmental sustainability. The Surrey Hills Enterprise’s membership continues to receive steady growth with nearly 200 members, and Bramley Golf Club hosted a new members event on 22 August. There is a development group looking at the corporate, tourism and hospitality sector which will feature large in the new website
2. **Surrey Hills Wood Fair.** Enterprises will be organising this year’s Wood Fair on Saturday 10 and Sunday 11 September. This is a major event in the Surrey Hills calendar planning to attract 6 – 7,000 visitors to promote, educate and inform all that is good about wood. This year we are organising a larger Making Space for Nature zone with talks, demonstrations and activities, including information for farmers, land managers and parish councils on FiPL.
3. **Surrey Hills Sustainable Business Conference**. Pennyhill Park will be hosting the annual conference on Thursday 6 October. This will include the launch of the new Surrey Hills website to show how it will profile environmental sustainable business in Surrey.

**Advocacy, Partnership and Coordination**

1. **Surrey Hills Partnership.** Partners have been invited to meet after the Surrey Hills AONB Board on 7 September. This will be an opportunity to receive updates from the Surrey Hills AONB Board, networking and sharing of information. The date for the annual Partnership Tour is provisionally 28 October. This is being arranged in the east of the county to look at issues including the boundary extension, inspiring views and care farming.
2. **Surrey Hills Community Forum**. This year’s Forum was due to take place on 29 July was postponed due to a clash of commitments. Discussions are taking place with the Surrey Association of Local Councils (SALC) about rearranging it or perhaps to include a Surrey Hills update at SALC’s AGM. In the meantime, parish councillors have been invited with a complementary place to the Wood Fair for advice on FiPL grants, talks and demonstrations.
3. **Surrey Hills Symposium with Surrey University**. This year’s Symposium is being planned for 23 November with the theme of Nature Connection – exploring diversity and inclusion in the countryside. Based on the feedback from last year, the demand is to retain a hybrid event, to focus on the Surrey Hills and our projects and to have a longer session to allow networking and a marketplace.
4. **National Association for AONBs.** The Surrey Hills Director, Communication Lead and Projects and Volunteer Coordinator will be attending the Association’s Landscapes for Life Conference, *The Nation's Landscapes? Peoples and Places*, in Lancaster from 13 to 15 September. The CEO, John Watkins, will be visiting the Surrey Hills on 17 October.

**Conclusions:**

1. By working in collaboration, the Surrey Hills AONB family manages to deliver across a broad agenda in pursuit of the agreed vision for the Surrey Hills.

**Financial and value for money implications**

1. The Surrey Hills AONB team delivers the above programme of work with its core budget. Collaborating through the Surrey Hills family and partners demonstrates a high level of success in securing additional resources.

**Equalities and Diversity Implications**

1. The diversity of the Surrey Hills activity provides a wide range of opportunities to engage residents, businesses, and wider communities to understand, access and enjoy the Surrey Hills.

**Risk Management Implications**

1. The key risks are identified in the Risk Register that is reported annually to the AONB Board’s AGM based on reputational, performance, finance, and governance risks. This will inform the delivery of the programme to mitigate risks as appropriate.

**Next steps:**

Members’ advice will help to inform the delivery of the AONB Management Plan.

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**Sources/background papers:**

* The Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan (2020 – 2025) https://www.surreyhills.org/board/our-management-plan/