

SURREY HILLS AONB BOARD

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 3rd MARCH 2021 BY ZOOM

CHAIR

*Heather Kerswell Independent

CORE MEMBERS

*Cllr Susan Parker	Guildford Borough Council
*Cllr Hazel Watson (Vice Chair)	Mole Valley District Council
*Cllr Rosemary Absalom	Reigate & Banstead BC
*Natalie Bramhall	Surrey County Council
*Cllr Geoffrey Duck	Tandridge District Council
*Cllr Ruth Reed	Waverley Borough Council
*Stephanie Fudge	National Trust
*Andrew Smith	Natural England (Defra)

ADVISORY MEMBERS

*Romy Jackson	National Farmers Union
*Kristina Kenworthy	CPRE
*Mike Waite	Surrey Wildlife Trust
*Tim Bamford	CLA
*Liz Cutter	SALC
*Gordon Jackson	Surrey Hills Society & Surrey Hills Trust Fund
*Wendy Varcoe	Surrey Hills Enterprises CIC
*Ali Clark	Surrey Hills Arts

*Members present

IN ATTENDANCE

Rob Fairbanks	Surrey Hills AONB Office Director
Denise Furlonger	Surrey Hills AONB Office
Clive Smith	Surrey Hills AONB Office
Caroline Price	Surrey Hills AONB
Ken Bare	Surrey Hills Society
Chris Howard	Surrey Hills Society
Carolyn McKenzie	Surrey County Council
Ian Dunsford	Reigate & Banstead BC
Cllr Ramsey Nagaty	Guildford BC
Rod Shaw	Mole Valley DC
John Oliver	Member of public
Sally Blake	Member of public
Jenny Desoutter	Member of public
Andrew Gibbons	Member of public
Kieran Foster	Adviser

			ACTIONS
1		INTRODUCTIONS	
		Heather Kerswell welcomed all to the meeting. Heather asked if there were any conflicts of interest and none were declared.	
2		APOLOGIES	
		Alistair Burtenshaw, Sarah Jane Chimbwandira, Simon Whalley	
3		MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING	
	3.1	The minutes of the last meeting held on 2 nd December were agreed.	
4		MATTERS ARISING	
	4.1	Item 4 Boundary Review. Heather asked Andy Smith to provide an update. Andy responded that Natural England was still awaiting confirmation of budget but has already completed some preparatory work and is in a good position for when they are given the green light to start.	
	4.2	5.1 – Public Questions. Rob Fairbanks apologised that he had not got back to John Oliver with a further written response about the Surrey Hills Enterprises sustainability and governance issues. Heather responded that she thought a meeting was being planned to discuss this as soon as we are out of lockdown.	RF
5		PUBLIC QUESTIONS	
	5.1	Heather referred to John Oliver’s question and AONB Board response and asked John if he had a supplementary question. John thanked the AONB Board for the response to his question. Following statements from DEFRA and the National Association for AONBs regarding possible cuts to AONBs budgets, John wished to know what steps the AONB Board had identified that it will take to reduce its operations in the event of a funding cut, and did the AONB Board agree that it would be prudent in this eventuality to cease cosmetic activities such as placing artistic objects in the countryside and concentrate its resources, time, and effort into enhancing natural beauty. John also asked if he could have a copy of the AONB Business Plan. Heather asked Rob if he could give a brief response, but she thought it was a matter for the future rather than requiring an immediate response. Rob said that we have not yet received a formal grant offer from DEFRA for 2021/22 but we are anticipating a stand still budget. He added that there was a potential growth item for a Farming in Protected Landscapes programme. It was anticipated that we will hear about this by the end of March. Heather added that she is not looking to cut back on the activities of the AONB Board which were all delivering the adopted AONB Management Plan and if necessary will look to find extra resources.	
	5.2	Heather referred to Sally Blake’s question and AONB Board response and asked Sally if she had a supplementary question. Sally thanked the Chair for the response and said that her question related to the 5,000 hectares of SSSI within the AONB of which one third was last assessed to be in unfavourable condition. Policy B1 of the Management Plan is to restore it to favourable condition. We are in the middle of a climate, biodiversity, pollution and pandemic crisis and a huge amount of work is needed to increase and restore areas of nature in the AONB to help address this crisis. The NAAONBs said that of the Colchester Declaration 2019 that now is the time to significantly increase the scale and pace of nature conservation activities in AONBs. She asked whether the AONB Board would vote to allocate its limited	

	<p>money and time to increasing and restoring nature, rather than to art in the landscape installations that are far less important, not natural beauty and are locally unpopular.</p> <p>Heather responded that we do have a balanced AONB Management Plan which includes our important arts activities which were originally funded by a generous donor. Rob added that he appreciated Sally’s point and said that we are awaiting the news from DEFRA about a £53million allocation for AONBs and National Parks that will be directed at working with landowners and farmers to support nature recovery and to develop land management plans. We hope this will cover those designated sites to get them into better condition and Rob will update the Board and Sally as soon as we get news of that funding. Heather assured Sally that nature recovery is one of our main focuses, but we have to look across the board at the whole of our balanced AONB Management Plan. Heather also added that we welcomed any practical support that Sally can provide on nature recovery.</p>	RF
5.3	<p>Heather referred to Andrew Gibbons’s question and the AONB Board response and asked Andrew if he had a supplementary question.</p> <p>Andrew thanked the Board for its full response but he concluded that there had been no independent safety assessment, environmental impact study or public consultation on the Leith Hill Greenway project. He was concerned that parts of the route were narrow and muddy, some had loose surfaces and steep hills and had limited visibility. The business case suggested that by year three there will be around 27,000 cyclists using the route in addition to the current walkers and horse riders which posed important risks needing to be addressed. Andrew said that he did not think there could be an immediate response to his supplementary question but asked if the AONB Board would consider commissioning an independent safety assessment so that the high areas of risk can be identified and remedied. He felt that a lot of problems could be mitigated with good signage but an independent assessment would make the options clearer. Andrew added that he hoped in the interests of public safety that the Board would support the case for the proposal for an independent assessment and some means of funding it. He also offered to put his thoughts in a written submission if that would be useful.</p> <p>Heather wished to assure Andrew that we work very closely with SCC Highways and the Countryside Access Team who were the competent body to assess and oversee the works on public rights of way. It was agreed that Rob would contact Andrew to arrange a date for them to walk the route to look at areas of concern.</p>	RF
5.4	<p>Heather drew the public question time to an end and thanked John, Sally and Andrew for the questions and their interest in the Surrey Hills AONB. We had also received a question from Jill Richardson-Jones that had received a written response.</p>	
6	PROPOSED ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE AONB BOARD/JOINT COMMITTEE	
6.1	<p>Rob Fairbanks provided the background and explained we need to make sure that AONB Board Joint Committee meetings comply with Surrey County Council’s Standing Orders. SCC Democratic Services have told us that committee meetings in public session should be held on secure Microsoft Teams platform and webcast in line with the Remote Meeting Regulations. The AONB Unit does not have the access or expertise to use the Teams platform or be able to webcast from Warren Farm Barns. It has been proposed that Democratic Services would support two formal meetings per annum and there would be an opportunity to have two informal meetings at other venues. Rob also advised that there should be an additional third recommendation which was to undertake a review of the Constitution to confirm changes at the AGM in</p>	

		September.	
6.2		The Members debated the proposal at length. Some supported two formal meetings and two informal meetings and felt that getting out into the Surrey Hills in a more informal way would enhance engagement with partners and the understanding of the issues. Others felt uncomfortable at going down to two formal meetings per year and suggested that if Surrey County Council was unable to support more than two meetings per year, the other statutory local authorities could support the other meetings. It was also suggested that if the number of formal meetings was reduced to two per annum, there would be nothing to prevent additional meetings to be called if necessary.	
6.3		Susan Parker requested that there be a formal vote from the Core funding partners.	
6.4		Susan Parker and Hazel Watson wished that it be noted that they object to the proposal to reduce the formal Board meetings to two per year and would like the number to remain at four per annum. Hazel added that she felt that two was not sufficient for the amount of business that we have but did not object to additional informal meetings at other venues.	
6.5		It was agreed that the Board could not make a decision at this meeting as it was a constitutional matter and any changes to the Constitution would need to be ratified by the Statutory funding Members of the Board. Heather will seek advice from Democratic Services and a report will be brought to the AGM in September.	HK/RF
6.6		Rob Fairbanks said he was very aware that at the moment we are not compliant with our existing meetings. The report will be seen by the Statutory Members Group and the other funding partners before being brought to the AGM.	
7		ADOPTION OF ART AND LANDSCAPE STRATEGY	
7.1		Ali Clarke provided a presentation to give the background into the commissioning of the Arts In The Landscape Strategy by the National Association for AONBs, which was seeking the support of the respective AONB partnerships.	
7.2		The Members discussed the arts and landscape strategy. Many were supportive of art being a way to engage the public and to remind them of the designation. They agreed that any art installations should be sensitive to the AONB. Gordon Jackson emphasised that the Inspiring Views artworks also involved conservation due to opening up a view and gave the example of creating scrapes for butterflies and improving access. Some Members had mixed feelings and were aware that not all members of the public liked art in the landscape and were wary that we should not urbanise the landscape.	
7.3		Ali Clarke responded that she understood the reservations many of the Board Members may have, but the majority of the artworks had been temporary. The permanent pieces are all site specific, have a function and that conservation and engagement were important.	
7.4		The Members agreed to give cautious approval to the Strategy and to consider any funding requests as they arose.	
8		AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN REPORTING	
8.1		Rob Fairbanks updated that Defra is developing plans for a new National Landscape Service as proposed by Glover. AONBs and National Parks were being asked for information. There should be more information on this at a Chair level meeting later in March. Government had confirmed that £53m was committed over the next 3 years for a Farming in Protected Landscapes programme. He did not have any details yet	

	<p>or what the respective allocations would be. Rob’s judgement was that it is likely to involve direct payments to farmers and land managers for their time and for small capital payments for habitat and access works. The scheme should start in June and we will update the Board as soon as we know. In the meantime, our Defra ELMS test and trials project on Making Space for Nature, that was profiled at the Symposium, will be written up by June and should help inform the programme. There will be a summary Nature Recovery Strategy that will be sent to partners and this should help inform the County’s work on natural capital mapping and a strategic land use framework for the Surrey</p> <p>Rob reported that Surrey County Council was undertaking a restructuring with the intention of integrating the AONB to provide it with more support. The outcome should still be an AONB unit and budget that is accountable to the AONB Board. Heather confirmed that the SCC Director has offered to consult with the AONB Board .</p> <p>Caroline Price said that there is great concern over the high numbers of visitors to the Surrey Hills and we were expecting an increase when Covid restrictions ease. She reported working with the National Association for AONBs and National Parks to coordinate messaging, and the NAAONBs is pulling together a joint press release. Also, Natural England was working on a revamped Countryside Code. Caroline also said that the website has now become dated and needed to be redeveloped. Tenders had gone out and we are looking to secure funding to progress it.</p>	
8.2	<p>Wendy Varcoe updated that Enterprises has been able to deliver a programme of events following the Government’s timetable for a roadmap out of Covid restrictions. This includes a Sustainability Conference, artisan festivals and the Wood Fair will return in September. Dates and details would be circulated to the AONB Board through the Enterprises newsletter.</p> <p>There had been an increase in Members. Enterprises was looking at a leisure and tourism offer focusing on environmental sustainability. There was also work on a feasibility study to find a way to engage more people with sustainable products and experiences in the Surrey Hills, and part of that will include funding for nature recovery projects in partnership with the Society. Heather thanked Wendy for the update and reminded the Members that the work carried out through Enterprises comes at no cost to the AONB Board.</p>	
8.3	<p>Gordon Jackson provided an update on the Surrey Hills Society. A newsletter was about to be issued themed on Dark Skies. Gordon thanked Kristina Kenworthy and John Evans for their contributions. There were plans to arrange an event as an opportunity to promote the Dark Skies Matter website but it would have to wait until after restrictions are lifted.</p> <p>The Society is looking to develop a diverse range of events with partners. They are also looking to engage a community volunteer coordinator to deliver practical support to communities on the back of the Making Space for Nature work. This will be working closely with SALC.</p> <p>Gordon was hopeful that his Chairman's Day will return this year and asked the AONB Board to let him have any ideas for a suitable venue.</p>	
8.4	<p>Liz Cutter updated that the Community Forum and Symposium last year highlighted the demand for advice and support to create space for nature. There were plans for a link to a Wikki website for people to load and share information. This was an exciting opportunity to be working through SALC with our parish and town councils on a Greening Communities programme that improved places to live and work, particularly if the outcome could help reduce the impact of traffic on our country lanes and villages. We want to re-establish a new Working Group to launch in June and will need support from Pennie King</p>	

		of the AONB team. Liz referred to a demonstration project with Ewhurst Parish Council and expressed gratitude to Colin Davis for providing pro-bono advice. It was hoped that this could be promoted as best practice to other rural communities, perhaps looking at coordinating bids to Your Fund Surrey.	
	8.5	Gordon Jackson highlighted that there are a couple of priorities for the Trust Fund. As well as supporting community projects, the proposed volunteer coordinator could help support our landowners particularly dealing with managing access. We will be seeking support from the bike community through volunteering and helping to fund the work. A Surrey Hills Epic event was planned for 17th July as a fundraiser and the Surrey Hills Challenge is planned for 26th September. We will be talking with Surrey County Council and Surrey Heartlands with the purpose of bringing together health and wellbeing communities with green communities. It's important that it is understood that our work with the Biking Community is designed to manage biking trails better and not to support unrestricted biking across the Surrey Hills, which is a concern of many.	
	8.6	Ali Clarke gave an update on Surrey Hills Arts and reported that Heathland Artworks will return to Farnham Heath with the artworks being selected in June. Two Inspiring Views projects are going ahead at the moment and both will include slopes to give access for wheelchairs. The Paloma Gormley Bench had received planning permission at Watts, Compton, and Ali suggested that this could be a possible venue for the Society Chairman's Day.	
	8.7	Heather thanked all for their updates and asked if there were any queries. Susan Parker requested a finance report from the Trust Fund and Enterprises to show the financial benefits to the AONB and a briefing was offered to her. Hazel Watson said she was impressed by the wide-ranging amount of work that is being done and was particularly glad to hear about the work with the NAAONBs to try to discourage people from visiting the AONBs during restrictions. She said she is particularly concerned about the upcoming Easter weekend.	
	9	ANY OTHER BUSINESS	
	9.1	There was none	
	10	DATES FOR 2021	
		13:30 Wednesday 16th June – Board Friday 2nd July – Partnership Tour 13:30 Wednesday 1st September – Board AGM 13:30 Wednesday 1st December - Board	

The above minutes are a true record of the Surrey Hills Board meeting held on Wednesday 3rd March 2021

Signature of Chair

Date