



Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Board

22nd June 2021

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:

2. 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 AONB 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.

3. 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
4. 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

5. **AONB Boundary Review.** In June there will be a Defra announcement confirming that Natural England will be embarking on a study to consider the extension of the Surrey Hills AONB. Natural England will be commissioning consultants to engage the community to develop the evidence base and identify an area that Natural England could consider to be the basis for the statutory consultation.
6. **Planning.** Although the level of consultations on development proposals continues to be high, there are currently no major development proposals in the Surrey Hills. Concern has been raised with Trading Standards regarding the sales articles on land that is being sold off in plots at Wanborough. This demonstrates the importance of maintaining the integrity of farms and estates.

Landscape Conservation and Enhancement

7. **Environmental Land Management Scheme Test and Trials.** The Surrey Hills was one of 11 AONBs that was part of a Farming for the Nation programme that helped to design the new Environmental Land Management Scheme that Defra will launch in 2024. The focus of the Surrey Hills test and trial was based on delivering a nature recovery strategy for the AONB based on key species that indicate healthy habitats that deliver the wider environmental goods set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan. The Surrey Hills was also a focus for a viticulture and a small woodland ELMS test and trails led by the Kent Downs AONB and the Small Woods Association respectively.
8. **Nature Recovery Strategy – Making Space for Nature.** The ELMS Test and Trail has developed a land manager and farmer led approach to nature recovery. This will be the basis of delivering the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme as considered under Agenda Item 8.
9. **Land Manager Clusters.** The Surrey Hills contracts facilitators for 3 cluster schemes funded under the Defra Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Scheme which are the North Downs, Greenscapes, and West Surrey Greensands. The funding has been extended until 2022 and a priority is to extend the membership and seek to create a new Cluster in

the east Surrey Hills, which could encompass the area of search for the AONB extension. There will be a new funding window for this in September 2021.

10. **Network Rail Lineside Habitat Action Plan.** The AONB Board is developing work with Network Rail on working with adjacent landowners to map, plan and coordinate land management investment. Plans are being developed as a pilot with key landowners between Guildford and Reigate, include the possibility of communities getting involved with the management of some Network Rail sites.
11. **Natural Capital investment.** Surrey CC has commissioned EFTEC to undertake a natural capital account for the Surrey Hills AONB. The report should be available in the summer. Discussions and site visits are also taking place with Network Rail about delivering investments along the rail corridor.
12. **Conservation Volunteer Coordinator.** The Surrey Hills Society is currently recruiting a volunteer coordinator. The role is to advise and support the coordination of volunteers to take practical action that improves biodiversity and access across the Surrey Hills AONB. Funding has been secured through the Community Foundation for Surrey and the AONB Board is making a £5k contribution.
13. **Greening Communities.** A new 'Nature' section has been added to the Surrey Hills website which features information on 'How to help Nature' in your garden (<https://www.surreyhills.org/how-to-help-nature/>) as well as a contact form for those interested in getting involved in nature recovery schemes run by Surrey Wildlife Trust and Naturehood. A new Surrey Hills Species web section is currently being built which will profile a range of species that can be found across the Surrey Hills.

Access, Enjoyment and Understanding

14. **Surrey Hills Website.** Brief written and submitted/ 4 Tenders received/ 2 shortlisted and one finalised. Now awaiting funding to proceed. Working with local authorities to identify budget and resources for autumn launch. The new website will include a better visitor offering and community hub element.
15. **Rail to Ramble.** In our work to encourage sustainable access to the Surrey Hills, the Surrey Hills AONB Board and Society in partnership with the South East Communities Rail Partnership has produced 4 new walk routes to promote walking between railway stations along the North Downs line. This new Rail to Ramble project covers the stations between Guildford and Betchworth. The project will be officially launched on 29 June and Great Western Rail will promote throughout their network during Summer 2021.
16. **Community Rail.** The Surrey Hills to South Downs Community Rail Partnership have recently launched their new website

<https://hills2downs.org.uk/> with information about the villages and landscapes connected via the railway line. The partnership works with South Western Railway and the Community Rail network to deliver projects and initiatives that link the line with local communities and the surrounding landscapes of the Surrey Hills and South Downs National Park. A Line Guide has also been created and designed in collaboration with all partners. [Click here to download the guide.](#)

17. **Surrey Strategic Greenway Strategy.** The Surrey Strategic Greenway strategy was presented to the Surrey Hills AONB Board in June 2020 and was widely supported. The demonstration project was the Leith Hill Greenway that was resurfaced and signed. Since the last AONB Board meeting, presentations on the strategy have been made to the Mole Valley, Guildford and Waverley Cycle Forums, and an onsite meeting at Denbies with the Ramblers Association to review the Leith Hill Greenway. One development is that Surrey CC has now consulted whether there should now be a Traffic Regulation Order for the Wolvern's Lane stretch. The option to permanent ban on motorised vehicles was supported by the AONB Board.
18. **PR .** A new PR schedule has been created so that Surrey Hills stories from across the family are regularly issued to the press. Recent stories have included the dangers of wildfires, No Mow May (but this should have been extended to June!), the Countryside Code, launch of the Surrey Hills Champion scheme, International Trails Day, and celebrating dark skies; which even made it onto Swiss television.
19. **Heathland Artworks.** This annual exhibition in partnership with UCA and the RSPB launches on 24 June at RSPB Farnham Heath. We intend to do some guided walks with targeted groups over Summer.
20. **Inspiring Views.** Radius by James Tunnard launches 30 June. James is running workshops making wildlife habitats with people at the Patchworking Garden and young people. A film is being made of this project as well as a podcast. We have connected the North Downs Way to this site at Denbies hillside and had a wheelchair friendly slope installed.
21. **Habitat.** Surrey Hills Arts is submitting an application to Arts Council for this pilot project with the University of Surrey and Surrey Wildlife Trust. The project will see artists and scientists share knowledge and skills to create a well-designed space for nature on campus which will include sculptural habitats. We will also create a wild space at the local Kings College secondary school in their grounds.
22. **Footprints.** Story teller Jon Mason is researching the history of 3 sites in South West Surrey – Hindhead, Frensham and Hascombe Hill. Going back as far as the Iron Age, Jon will create a series of podcasts that informs the listener of the varied history and how humans have shaped and continue to shape the landscape. Jon will also do 2 live story telling performances at Frensham on the 23rd July and Hindhead on the 29th July as part of the Surrey Archaeology Festival.

23. **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.

Family Member	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram
Surrey Hills AONB	7,309	6,059	3520
Surrey Hills Enterprises	884	82	2776
Surrey Hills Society	209	525	1401
Surrey Hills Arts	No account	No account	2688

Growing the Surrey Hills Economy

24. **Surrey Hills Champions.** In June, Surrey Hills Enterprises launched this this new campaign. Squires is sponsoring the project as our Champion of Champions. The new Director, David Taylor, developed the idea and Maggie created the key messages, processes and marketing materials. Surrey Hills Society is the Delivery Partner delivering the tree planting and nature recovery projects. See: <https://www.surreyhills.org/surreyhillschampion/>
25. **Surrey Hills Artisan Festival.** This will be taking place over the weekend of Saturday 3rd and Sunday 4th July at Denbies. It will showcase Surrey Hills food, drink, arts and crafts. Sponsorship has been received by Saffery Read. See: <https://www.surreyhills.org/events/surrey-hills-artisan-festival-2021/>
26. **Surrey Hills Sustainable Business Conference,** This Conference is generously sponsored and hosted by Exclusive Hotels at Pennyhill Park on Friday 16th July 2021. We have a range of excellent speakers including AONB Board Member Marisa Heath on Greener Futures and Michael Gove on Climate Change - towards COP 26 and Net Zero. There will also be presentations from a range of Surrey Hills Enterprises Members, C2C, Institute of Directors and www.surreyhills.org/events/surreyhillssustainabilityconference/
27. **The Guide to Surrey Hills.** The Enterprises team is in the process of developing this new key Surrey Hills brochure promoting our circa 150 Members. It is being sponsored by Squires.
28. **Surrey Hills Artisan Markets.** Surrey Hills Branded Gazebo purchased and used for the first time at our first stall at Guildford Farmers Market today with 2 of our Members, Nordic Wellness Drinks and Delightfully Decadent. A great way to showcase our Trade marked Members. Sue has agreed to be our Champion for the Markets as was able to visit this morning to support our Members.
- **Cranleigh's Surrey Hills Artisan Markets** on 10th July, 7th August, 2nd October, 6th November, 4th December Christmas Artisan Market
 - **Guildford Farmers Markets** on the first Tuesday of the month

29. **Green Growth Recovery Fund - 'Rail to Trail'**. The Conservation Volunteers (formerly BTCV) has submitted a bid for circa £450k to the Green Growth Recovery Fund. Partnering with the High Weald, Kent Downs and Surrey Hills AONBs. This will be working with landowners to promote countryside access points by rail and foot from urban centres to trails and wildlife sites. It will improve access to nature for underrepresented urban audiences – young people, ethnic minorities, and people from deprived areas – by helping them experience nature connection and develop conservation skills within AONB landscapes. TCV plans to create 5 FTE and retain 1.49 FTE jobs; £150,488 supply chain spend includes services from other environmental charities. Landowners have all provisionally agreed to participate with sight of draft agreements. We expect to know the outcome of the bid in July.

Advocacy. Partnership and Coordination

30. **Glover Review.** We are still awaiting a formal response from Government to the Glover Review of National Parks and AONBs that was published on 21st September 2019. In the meantime, Defra has been requesting further information and organising Chair level briefings on developments. This includes ideas around a new National Landscape Service with executive functions, a Landscape Bill and various programmes have been announced including Farming in Protected Landscapes and Designation Reviews. In May, Lord Benyon was appointed as the new Minister for Rural Affairs with responsibility for National Landscapes.
31. **Wild Mountain Bike Trails.** With the easing of lockdown, there has been an unprecedented increase in wild mountain biking across large areas of the Surrey Hills. The AONB Director and Cycling UK has recently convened meetings of key landowners including the Forestry Commission, National Trust, Surrey CC, and the Friends of the Hurtwood to understand the issues and discuss possible solutions. The plan is to develop into an area wide policy to help tackle the problem. We have also been helping to coordinating poster campaigns with the National Trust, Surrey Wildlife Trust and Surrey Police regarding illegal activity.
32. **Events.** The Surrey Hills Challenge on 26th September and the Surrey Hills Epic on 17th July are two events that will be making a contribution to the Surrey Hills Trust Fund. Events are a means to organise, inspire and educate large numbers of people to access and enjoy the Surrey Hills, as well as a means of generating income for landowners through site fees and licences. There is concern however about the additional impact on the landscape and local communities, particularly off-road sportive cycle events. By far the largest such event will be the UK Cycling Ltd Gravel Classic that will be taking place on Sunday 27th June from Loseley Park Estate. The Surrey Hills AONB Board has a policy of listing all known events on our website to inform the community and working with Surrey County Council on produce guidance for off-road sportives.
33. **National Climate Change collaboration.** The National Association for AONB (NAAONB) has launched a Collaborative Climate Change Action

Programme with the following workstreams on nature-based solutions, agriculture, buildings, technology, transport and tourism. This will be a focus for the NAAONB Annual Landscapes for Life Conference in July.

34. **Surrey Hills Community Forum on 29th July.** In partnership with SALC, the annual Community Forum will be taking place online. This will include an update on the work of the Surrey Hills AONB Board, the AONB Boundary Extension work and Greening Communities. Although this is principally an opportunity for parish councils to engage, AONB Board Members are encouraged to attend.
35. **Surrey Hills Symposium.** Please note that our annual symposium at Surrey University is being planned for Wednesday 24th November. The theme is 'Climate Emergency – Inspiring Communities into Action'. It is hosted by the Vice Chancellor, Max Lu, and we have a range of great speakers and the broadcaster Jim Al-Khalili will be chairing the panel debate.
36. **Green Prescribing Surrey Heartlands.** Surrey Heartlands Health and Care Partnership have been successful in securing one of seven Green Social Prescribing 'Test and Learn' pilots in England. This will work with partners across the health, care and nature-based sectors to overcome barriers and identify how green social prescribing can be 'scaled up' for the benefit of communities. The AONB Director is co-chairing the Evaluation of the project.
37. **E-newsletter database.** The Surrey Hills AONB and Surrey Hills Enterprises databases have been merged into one to help streamline communications. A new 'Friends of the Surrey Hills' e-newsletter will be issued on a 6 weekly basis which will bring together the work of the entire Surrey Hills family in one e-newsletter.

Conclusions:

38. 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

39. 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

40. 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

41. 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.

Report contact: **Rob Fairbanks, Surrey Hills AONB Director**

Contact details: **07772 365036**
 Rob.fairbanks@surreyhills.org

Sources/background papers:

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