**Item**

##### AONB

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

15th June 2022

UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Surrey Hills

**Purpose of the report:**

To consider the opportunity for the Surrey Hills AONB to support the development and delivery of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

**Recommendations:**

It is recommended that:

1. The AONB Board encourages our local authorities to include Surrey Hills AONB objectives for the rural economy in their respective Local Investment Plans and champions the role of Surrey Hills Enterprises to support their delivery

**Introduction:**

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF or the Fund) is a central pillar of the UK government’s ambitious Levelling Up agenda and a significant component of its support for places across the UK. It provides £2.6 billion of new funding for local investment by March 2025, with all areas of the UK receiving an allocation from the Fund via a funding formula rather than a competition.

The UKSPF will support the UK government’s wider commitment to level up all parts of the UK by delivering on each of the levelling up objectives:

* Boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging
* Spread opportunities and improve public services, especially in those places where they are weakest
* Restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost
* Empower local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency

**The Surrey Context:**

The funding and delivery of the UK SPF is being devolved to each district, borough and unitary authority. Our 5 boroughs and districts in the Surrey Hills AONB each have a £1m allocation. The spend of the UK SPF will be driven by a Local Investment Plan (LIP) developed and decided by each local authority. The funding is available for the next two financial years.

There is a strong statutory link also as the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 makes it clear that the role of the AONB Management Plan is to formulate the local authority policy for the management of the AONB and for carrying out their functions in relation to it, the Act also places a duty to have regard to the purposes of the AONB. These two statutory requirements mean that, where appropriate, the AONB Management Plan should be an influential document with regards to the preparation and delivery of each local authority Local Investment Plan. Although each local authority have to write their own Investment Plan by August, there is Government push for collaboration and cross-border working, whereby the Surrey Hills AONB could help our local authorities meet some of these requirements.

The guidance for Local Investment Plans also demonstrates some potentially strong links between the intentions of the UK SPF and the intentions of the adopted AONB Management Plan; these include:

•            A focus on pride of place

•            Support for rural communities

•            Support for managing the natural environment, green space, historic and cultural heritage and reducing carbon emissions

•            Support for creating jobs, including in the rural and tourism sectors

•            Support for ‘green growth’

•            Investments should be aligned with the Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan which specifically mentioned the role of National Landscapes and nature recovery.

Our Surrey Hills Enterprises CIC is well placed to work with our local authorities to help develop and deliver their Local Investment Plans in support of its aims:

1. Supporting environmentally sustainable businesses in the Surrey Hills

2. Promoting Surrey Hills Business Members to local communities & visitors

3. Generating Investment in the Surrey Hills

This could help to deliver the following UK SPF priorities:

* Funding for the development and promotion (both trade and consumer) of the visitor economy, such as local attractions, trails, tours and tourism products more generally. For example, extending events like the Wood Fair and the Artisan Festival.
* Investment in open markets and improvements to town centre retail and service sector infrastructure, with wrap around support for small businesses. For example, extending the Artisan markets across Surrey and pop-up shops for town centres
* Strengthening local entrepreneurial activity and supporting businesses at all stages of their development to start, sustain, grow and innovate, including through local business networks. For example, developing Enterprises business to business mentoring programmes.

**Next Steps:**

The recommendation and this paper will be shared with the respective local authorities.

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