

AONB Board 22 June 2021

Item 7 : Public Questions and Replies

1. Jenny Desoutter to ask the Chair:

We have probably all enjoyed cycling at some point in our lives, and since the Olympics cycling has become increasingly popular in the Surrey Hills. But whereas a bike was once seen as a means to get from a to b, recent technological development has led to cycling as a sport, and it is this specific use which seems to predominate here in the Surrey Hills.

Cyclists on roads can irritate the faster car drivers, but off the road cyclists are the more powerful, faster traffic and this has been having a significant impact on the experience of walkers and non-cyclists. It can be intimidating suddenly to encounter a troop of fast-moving bikers and be obliged quickly to jump out of the way. It is startling when a cyclist suddenly overtakes from behind and you haven't heard them coming. The speed and silence can be unsafe too, and there have been accidents with animals and also with people. *

**For the last year I have been compiling accounts of individual experiences in the Surrey countryside and I had intended to submit this as supportive background to this question but completion has been delayed.*

Cycling and walking are often "lumped together," but there are significant differences. Sports cycling is a high-energy activity, releasing adrenalin and often involving a competitive attitude. Walking involves stilling down to nature's pace, letting go of stresses, and releasing endorphins. They are healthy in different ways. Sadly, many walkers have found it increasingly difficult to relax and enjoy the benefits of a walk when fast traffic makes them feel vulnerable. This is not a criticism of cycling, it is a result of the increase in speed and numbers on a shared path.

The AONB is known for promoting cycling, both in events and, for example, in launching the new MUR (Multi-User Route) between Box Hill and Leith Hill. The Grant Application form mentioned cycling 103 times and walking seven, and expected numbers of cyclists to increase by 27,000, with no corresponding reference to walkers. While advertised as traffic-free for cyclists, walkers must still negotiate the cyclists going at 3 to 4 times their speed, faster downhill, and on powerful machines.

Does the AONB recognise the equal, if different, value to mental and physical wellbeing of walking and if so could you adopt a policy of equally promoting walking and quiet enjoyment of the countryside, seeking to restore a healthier balance between all activities, for example by installing along the MUR, and elsewhere in the Surrey Hills as appropriate, signs similar to this one depicted from Hampstead Heath?



Response:

Dear Jenny

Many thanks for your submitting your question.

The Surrey Hills AONB broadly agrees that the priority for multi user routes, like Greenways, through the Surrey Hills should not be used to encourage more sporting activity but to align with the vision that all members of society should have the opportunity to enjoy and appreciate our natural beauty for their health and well-being.

We already collaborate with Cycling UK and the British Horse Society in promoting responsible use through the 'Be Nice, Say Hi' campaign which was launched in the Surrey Hills. The signs have already been provided for the Greenway and a number of other multi-user routes in the Surrey Hills. Based on the Hampstead Heath sign, the Surrey Hills AONB Board would be interested in extending the message about 'Share with Care' and 'Go Slowly, Enjoy' on multi-user routes. The AONB Director will be in contact with you about this.

Regards the promotion of walking activities alongside cycling, it is of note by way of comparison that at the moment the Surrey Hills contains a number of long distance promoted walking trails, including the North Downs Way National Trail and the Greensand Way, alongside circa 60 promoted self-guided walks. I would also like to draw your attention to the commentary in the recent Glover Review of National Landscapes that:

"there seems little logic across the country to the nature of rights of way at the moment... almost all routes are only open to walkers, not horse riders or cyclists. As rural roads become busier and more dangerous, it is all the more important that fair access is given to all."

As such, it is considered that within the overall scheme of promoted routes and the strategic context of access in National Landscapes as identified in the Glover Review, the current balance is not disproportionately biased in favour of cycling.

Yours sincerely

Heather Kerswell, Independent Chair

2. Jill Richardson-Jones to ask the Chair:

The last page of the Management Plan Monitoring Framework shows that the Board will be discussing a “refresh” of the current Management Plan (which was due to be reviewed in 2023) with Surrey County Council (SCC).

Whilst I understand that the Board may not be able to state what the detail of that discussion might be, could you please let me know:

- what has prompted the decision to consider this;
- was this at the instigation of the Board or SCC;
- what the difference is between a ‘refresh’ and a ‘review’; and
- if there is a ‘refresh’ of the Plan, will any proposed changes be subject to public consultation before the changes are recommended to the local authorities that are members of the Surrey Hills Board?

Response:

Dear Jill

Thank you for your question. I confirm there are no plans for public consultation on the review or refresh of the published and adopted Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan (2020 – 2025).

The Plan sets out the vision and policy framework for the Surrey Hills as a National Landscape. However, there is an ongoing review of the Delivery Strategy as priorities are subject to resources and the ability to attract investment to deliver. Defra as our principal funding sponsor is also dictates that AONB Units should take opportunities to deliver on Glover’s 27 recommendations, although it is acknowledged that Government has not yet published its response to the Glover Review. These were considered by the Surrey Hills AONB Board in November 2020 and the following priorities were identified for the AONB team to take forward:

- 1 A new financial model – more money, more secure, more enterprising
- 2 AONBs strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources, renamed as National Landscapes
- 3 National landscapes should form the backbone of Nature Recovery Networks – joining things up within and beyond their boundaries
- 4 A central place for national landscapes in new Environmental Land Management Schemes
- 5 A new approach to coordinating public transport and new, more sustainable ways of accessing National Landscapes

6 A ranger service in all our national landscapes, part of a national family.

Opportunities to progress these priorities will be kept under review in the work of the AONB unit, the Family and in our ability to influence partners. I would be happy to discuss these with you.

Yours sincerely

Heather Kerswell, Independent Chair

3. Sarah Billingham, on behalf of residents and users of Ranmore Common, to ask the Chair:

As a group of residents and regular users of Ranmore Common, please will the Surrey Hills AONB Board consider promoting an area-wide Traffic Regulation Order to help address the increased illegal and antisocial behaviour on Ranmore Common that diminishes its safety and enjoyment for other recreational users and the damage to the Surrey Hills landscape?

Background and motivation to the question.

Our Vision for Ranmore Common

Ranmore Common is unique. It has a rich mix of history in addition to the more obvious attractions of the distant views, flora and fauna. It is a lesser-known Surrey hill and as such its tranquillity offers a flavour of its own.

Along the North Downs Way (NDW) (a Site of Special Scientific Interest) is a trail of WW2 pillboxes and Ranmore is home to many tank tracks that were laid by the Canadians during WW2. It is also home to the old logging tracks with their pretty Lovelace bridges and old drovers roads of Sheepwalk Lane and Drove Road with their ancient banks, ancient woodlands and bluebell woods. There is unexploited potential to create a ten mile circular 'history trail' which takes in these places, or an easy access cycle trail loop of similar distance.

There is also potential to design an eight mile 'wine trail' along the NDW between the Denbies and Albury vineyards. The Tillingbourne Brewery and Silent Pool distillery also make their homes here.

Ranmore offers the secret places of Dick Focks Woods and the Abinger roughs where children can discover the Witches tree and Rhody Ramble; ideal for young families. The wide concrete tracks laid by the Canadians could offer miles and miles of wide, open pathways and glades within woodlands; a great potential for young families to cycle around or to picnic within.

The sunrises and sunsets from Ranmore are stunning, and for bird enthusiasts we have a very special selection of birds. There are pop up cafes sited in some of our free car parks and we have a youth hostel, scout camp and several B&B establishments. There is easy access to Polesden Lacey, its

café and also Bocketts Farm and Sheepleas which are all unique and offer scope for all interests.

Our grassy downland slopes have a unique mix of bird, butterfly and wild flowers and there is potential to offer educational opportunities to adults and children alike; possibly with family conservation opportunities.

For the equestrian community there is vast potential as it is possible to ride horses across to Shere using the byway underpassing the A25 which links up Ranmore Common with Leith and Holmbury hills (although currently it is risky for horse riders due to the conflict of use with vehicles on this byway and the steep banks precluding safe joint use).

The recent launch of The Greenway from Denbies could be extended to include some of these delightful places, and 'spread the load' of visitors more evenly across the Surrey Hills.

Issues on Ranmore Common

As you will be aware Ranmore falls across two borough councils (Guildford and Mole Valley) and there are various landowners (the residents, Wotton Estate, Shere Woodlands, Polesden and Surrey Hills National Trusts and Forestry England). There are also at least two agencies that manage this land.

Due to this, as residents we come across a confusing mix of different departments or agencies (especially within the council) when we report crimes or issues such as antisocial behaviour, fly tipping, boundary breaches, property damage and access issues.

This confusion has led to an inability to report issues efficiently and so today we are left with damage being perpetrated in our locality on a regular basis and also an idea from our council that Ranmore Common is unscathed from antisocial behaviour and from the residents that we are not adequately protected.

Our byways have two sets of issues.

During the day it is the speed and frequency of the vehicular use, sometimes including aggressive driving/riding. This use, although largely 'legal', is usually made up of convoys of trail bikes or 4wd cars which leads to the byways not being used equally by 'all traffic' as they should be, due to the noise and disruption. Walkers avoid them. Van-loads of trail-bikes arrive here especially

at weekends and they ride around together in long convoys and wait for each other in large groups.

There is also the *illegal* use of trespassing onto woodland blatantly during the daytime as well as at night and assaults when walkers have asked motorbikes to slow down. These range between the shouted words of 'It's a sixty!' as they speed on without slowing down to the deliberate wheel-spinning of the rear wheel in order to spray the walker with dust, stones and/or mud (thus using their bike as a weapon). Some of the locations where trail bikes trespass are nesting sites for 'particular' birds of interest.

At night the problems are different with antisocial behaviour sometimes well into the early hours of the morning, again always in groups. This may be the use of very bright lights, loud shouting, revving of engines, banging, congregating outside houses causing disturbances, trespassing, setting fire to a vehicle, criminal damage or flytipping. Generally (although not exclusively) this tend to happen at weekends.

Winter is also a time when some individuals within the 4wd community come onto the byways particularly when it is snowing, raining or stormy in order to use the 'equipment' on their vehicles to get themselves out of water-filled ditches or over ancient banks into the woods which are more slippery when it is wet, thus more desirable.

The byways are in a shocking state of repair (particularly Sheepwalk Lane, see **photograph 1** where there is no surface left on the byway).

It is currently impassable other than in a robust 4wd car, and as such it attracts an increase in the 4wd car community traffic which creates still further damage as time goes by. The road surface has completely gone now and it is purely slippery clay soil and deeply rutted with ditches that are pretty much always water-filled. Word is out that Sheepwalk Lane is the best place to come to enjoy these conditions.

If a motorbike rider were to be accidentally pinned down underneath their bike in this location they could drown. The only way the trail bikers can get around this deeply rutted surface is to balance precariously along the newly formed 'banks' either side of these water-filled ditches which is immensely treacherous, or to trespass onto ancient woodland. This only seems to make the byway more appealing.

Landowners/managers are also understandably reluctant to shore up any breaches onto their land until the byway surface has been repaired, due to the general attraction this area has to these individuals as they will just create more breaches in their determination to access the desired location.

The council therefore needs to meet these landowners half way and provide a joined up approach that makes the trespass from the byway unappealing by replacing the byway surface, repairing it, and protecting the surrounding areas. The ancient banks of the byways have disappeared forever once destroyed and one of the listed Lovelace bridges has been severely damaged by illegal off-road use with vehicles literally driving up the flint banks.

The local police have informed us that they are unable to drive along Sheepwalk Lane (a fact that is known to perpetrators of crime) and criminals use our network of byways as escape routes (for example the ATM machine theft from East Horsley).

The latest antisocial 'visitors' have been on extremely loud 2-up quad bikes that look more like mini tractors and they come specifically to trespass onto private ancient woodland, gaining access from the byways. Please see **photograph 2** which is Wotton Estate land and is accessed from Drove Road. One public footpath has needed to be permanently closed (please see **photograph 3**) due to the extent of the damage from trespassing 4wd vehicles leaving the entire area under deep mud and water (this has also been accessed from the Drove Road).

Over time, the trespassed 'recreational' areas are visited sometimes on a nightly basis, thus increasing the severity and appeal of the breach/track. This is matched with a similar level of determination to keep it 'open' and should logs be placed in order to prevent this trespassing the fun is increased as these individuals utilise their winches and chainsaws. If a car is damaged beyond repair it is simply abandoned, set alight and reported as stolen to the police. One such car was abandoned last week and the fire brigade was unable to access the location. It was therefore left to burn out within an ancient woodland, on a public footpath and in close proximity to houses. Loud explosions could be heard from it at around 9pm.

During daylight hours it can be terrifying when you are walking along a narrow and winding byway to hear many motorbikes bearing down on you quickly,

especially if you have dogs or children that need to be gathered up in time and there is no place to stand safely.

Byways are open to ALL traffic, not just motorised vehicles. The speed limit of 60mph is unrealistic (although legal), and due to potholes and damaged byway surfaces walkers need to scramble up banks, or stand within verges and bushes in order to let vehicles pass. This is not offering equality of access to those of limited mobility or health. A culture seems to have developed whereby the onus is on the walker to keep themselves safe rather than the other way round.

Often (especially at weekends) an entire group of cars or trail motorbikes go by one after the other, which can be up to 10 or more and some go past walkers or horse riders very fast without slowing down. It has led to a reduction of use of the byways by pedestrians and horse riders, although the newer users of Ranmore Common (often young families and since lockdown and Covid19) can find themselves in precarious situations as they have not yet learnt to avoid these byways like more regular users and residents have. These groups of trailbikes or cars often congregate together outside residents' homes with their engines running which is also intimidating, especially at night which also occurs, usually with cars.

As a result of increased byway vehicular traffic, the recent increase in fly-tipping in this area is marked (please see **photograph 4**). This particular fly-tipped pile has been on Sheepwalk Lane since early April, and the council will not collect it as it lies at the side of the byway, not on the carriage-way itself. It was tipped here at night onto the middle of the byway and was subsequently moved out of the way by byway users in order to get past it. It makes the area tatty and the council are expecting the landowner to fund its removal. Further along the Drove Road there are several areas of fly-tipped rubbish which have been left for months and years and as it has scattered widely it will not be collected.

More specifically the temporary closure of Wolverns Lane has added to the use and antisocial activity on the byways on Ranmore, and a marked increase in their use by off-road vehicles. We are aware there is now a possibility that the temporary closure may be made permanent, which only serves to push the issues to other places within the Surrey Hills. We feel an overview

approach of all our hills as a whole would benefit our beautiful area, and considering it is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty it is surprising that it has such little protection.

Should sections of byway be closed we feel it would be necessary to use the large concrete 'lego blocks' as (although unsightly) these seem to be the most efficient way of permanently blocking access as the equipment of the 4wd vehicles is not adequate to heave these out of the way. Landowners also agree in principal with this solution. Perhaps local school children could design and paint these with suitable woodland themed artwork - we have our own forest school up on Ranmore who could do so.

Could we unite the approach towards the Surrey Hills and offer a greater recreational benefit for Surrey through a more joined up approach to safety, possibly through an area-wide Traffic Regulation Order for the Surrey Hills?

We would be happy to meet with members of your board to show them these issues.

As residents we are reluctant to provide addresses due to our remote locations and the intimidating behaviour we have on occasion been met with, and so we sign the letter with this omission. Names also appear in random order.

Yours faithfully,

Sarah Billingham
Eva Dixon
Ann Ford
Nina Samme
Michael Harvey
Victoria Phillips
Judith Gilbard
Katie Gilbard
John Irving
Patrick Hull
Susan Wood
Katherine Wicks
Quita Black
Karen Bushnell
Emily Bushnell
Gerry Horbacz
Rob Galbraith
Simon Woodruffe

Joseph Dixon
Richard Pearson
Lucy Jones
Matthew Samme
Jenny Jenkins
Karen Roberts
Marc Gilbard
Hugo Gale
Rosie Cattle
Denise Sherborne
Nick Wood
Clive Wicks
Stuart Park
David Bushnell
Charlotte Vincent
Robert Newton
Mary Suckling
Paul Medland

Verity Dixon
Louise Pearson
Stephen Jones
Corinne Bergman
A Phillips
Philip Warley
Sarah Gilbard
Heather Irving
Marisa Hull
Roger Watson
India Wood
Stephen Black
Shelley Park
Laura Bushnell
Simon Vincent
Alison Newton
Reuben Suckling
Damir Bettini

Tina Bettini
Suzanne Doherty
Donald Featherstone
Faye Hutchinson
Jon Machtynger
Katie Wadey
Eugenie Barron
John Hackett
Justine Robinson
Hilary Jones
Angela Ashcroft
Sam Hunt
Marie Cheek
Kate Shaale

Fiona Anderson
Matthew Doherty
Helen Hutchinson
Iliyan Rosewood
Alice Neal
Ken Burrage
Boris Bettini
Derek Craston
Ian Robinson
Marian Jefferson
Beverley Watson
Denise Shea
Mike Cheek
Andrew Shaale

Phil Anderson
Katherine Featherstone
Hannah Hutchinson
Liz Machtynger
Richard Wadey
Jane Burrage
Suzie Hackett
Laura Craston
Hedeel Aljezairy
Stephen Jefferson
Charles Watson
Daisy Hodges
Liam Cheek
Joshua Hodges



Photograph 1 Sheepwalk Lane damage.



Photograph 2 Private Wotton Estate land and off-road vehicular damage accessed from Drove Rd.



Photograph 3 Footpath (now closed) through Wotton Estate land rendered inaccessible by off-road damage.



Photograph 4 Fly-tipping on Sheepwalk Lane.

Response:

Dear Sarah

I would like to thank you on behalf of the 78 residents of Ranmore Common for your letter. I was shocked and saddened to see the damage being done to these byways and the surrounding habitats and historic landscape features.

The Surrey Hills AONB Board supports your calls for action to prevent this damage to the Surrey Hills AONB and sympathises with the impact that it has on residents and other recreational users in this beautiful and popular part of the Surrey Hills. I am also aware of evidence that similar problems are now shared across large areas of the Surrey Hills.

The powers of the AONB Board are limited in this regard. The management of highways, including byways and other Public Rights of Way sit with the county council and elected members as part of their highway authority duties. The law does however place a duty on all public bodies and statutory undertakers to have regard to the statutory AONB purposes under Section 84(4) of the CROW Act 2000:

A local planning authority whose area consists of or includes the whole or any part of an area of outstanding natural beauty has power, subject to subsections (5) and (6), to take all such action as appears to them expedient for the accomplishment of the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty or so much of it as is included in their area.

The council also has powers to issue traffic regulation orders on byways in order to protect the AONB, and a consultation is currently underway to impose such restrictions on Wolvens Lane. It would be a matter for the council to extend these restrictions to other byways by means of an area wide, omnibus order which we would encourage Surrey County Council to progress.

I, and I am sure other members of the AONB Board, would welcome the opportunity to meet residents on site to explore what can be done to address this matter and to enhance sustainable countryside access along the lines you suggest.

Yours sincerely

Heather Kerswell, Independent Chair

4. **Andrew Gibbons to ask the Chair:**

Measures to increase cyclists' use of bridleways are being taken despite the disamenity and possible risks to other users and to the Board's conservation responsibilities. The Mountain Biking Working Group (which was "established to progress the proactive management of mountain biking in the Surrey Hills") doesn't seem to have met since 2017, but the AONB has rapidly established the Leith Hill Greenway which caters more for cyclists than other recreational users. The Board now has an adviser who represents cycling interests.

Please explain how the AONB Board see their role in managing recreational cycling including mountain biking and, in order to ensure transparent representation of all user interests, consider whether to invite the Ramblers Association, Run Together, the British Horse Society, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the aimless wanderers to provide advisers to the Board to complement the one from Cycling UK.

Response:

Dear Andrew

The previous AONB Mountain Bike Working Group has not met in recent years as it was considered to have had little impact in helping to control mountain bike activity.

The easing of lockdown however has led to an unprecedented increase in wild mountain biking across large areas of the Surrey Hills. This has created a culture of entitlement that cyclists can ride anywhere regardless of land ownership and the impact on landscape, biodiversity and the safety of others. In response, the AONB Director 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 Greenway was not considered to fall within the remit of the mountain bike group and was a project developed with colleagues in Surrey County Council Countryside Access Team. The role of Cycling UK has been to offer advice to the AONB Director on a number of access issues affecting different users not just cyclists.

Regarding the wider issues raised, there is no consistent research showing significant increased risk from shared use, and comparisons between established figures shows that the highest risk to pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders comes from being forced onto the road network.

Attention is drawn to the comments made regards shared use of routes by Mr Justice Dove in *Stubbs (on behalf of Green Lanes Environmental Action*

Movement) v Lake District National Park Authority & Ors [2020] EWHC 2293 (Admin)

“we have no direct evidence of any incidents or accidents. Studies elsewhere with regard to conflicts between users have generally tended to show that the perception of danger when creating mixed use routes is far greater than the resultant reality once the routes have been created.”

Similarly, review of existing research by Natural England shows no significant generalized impact on wildlife and conservation priorities caused by shared use by cyclists and horse riders over and above the impact of access by walkers, particularly once the impact of dogs is taken into account.

I welcome the points you make however about ensuring that wider countryside access interests are engaged and I will instruct the AONB Director to consider this further and update you in due course.

Yours sincerely

Heather Kerswell, Independent Chair

5. Sally Blake to ask the Chair:

The Surrey Hills Board is supporting, and has promoted on its website, four of at least eight mass, long distance cycling and mountain biking events taking place through the Surrey Hills this year. These events go off-road through many of Surrey's most sensitive nature sites including Box Hill SSSI, Leith Hill SSSI, Thursley SSSI, Hankley SSSI, Frensham SSSI, Devil's Punch Bowl SSSI, Hurtwood SNCI, Holmbury Hill SNCI, Blackheath SSSI, Albury Heath SNCI, Farley Heath SNCI, Newlands Corner SNCI, Hackhurst and White Downs SSSI, St Martha's SNCI and Colyer's Hanger SSSI. These events are timed and are, therefore, 'races or trials of speed', illegal under s. 31 of the Road Traffic Act 1988.

The use of Surrey's nature sites for off-road cycling events, the increased ongoing use by off-road cyclists, and the attraction of off-road cyclists to the Surrey Hills from all over the UK, is degrading, damaging and disturbing Surrey's most important nature sites at this time of climate and biodiversity crises. The Government pledged on 28 September 2020 to protect and restore nature in 30% of the UK by 2030, including existing protected sites and all land in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and said action must be immediate.

What is the Board's policy and progress please, in following the Government pledge. In particular, what work is being done:

1. with landowners of our nature sites to help protect the sites by stopping off-road cycling events going through them, restricting off-road cyclists to public byways and bridleways, and instructing cyclists to ride slowly and give way to walkers and horses on public bridleways, as they are legally required to do under the Countryside Act 1968; and
2. to find one or more landowners prepared to rewild their land in Surrey, as other counties are doing, and work with landowners to rewild their land or restore the nature on it.

OFF-ROAD MASS CYCLING EVENTS IN SURREY 2021

These are the events found:

Surrey Hills Off-Roader - 2 May 2021 – 62 km

<https://gloriousgravel.com/product/gravel-sportives/surrey-hills-off-roader/>

<https://www.surreyhills.org/events/surrey-hills-off-roader/>

Glorious Gravel Secret Surrey Sportive - 16 May 2021 – 74 km

<https://www.sportive.com/events/glorious-gravel-secret-surrey-sportive/2021-05-16/5622/cycling>

Surrey Hills Bramley MTB Trail Ride - 5 June 2021 – 48 km, 37 km, 23 km routes

<https://www.trailbreak.co.uk/bramley-trail-ride/>

<https://www.surreyhills.org/events/bramley-trail-ride/>

Leith Hill-Brighton-Leith Hill Gravel Sportive - 19 June 2021 – 143 km

<https://gloriousgravel.com/product/gravel-sportives/leith-hill-brighton-leith-hill-gravel-sportive/>

Gravel Series North Downs - 27 June 2021 – 81 km, 59 km, 36 km, 18 km routes

<https://www.ukcyclingevents.co.uk/events/the-gravel-series-north-downs/>

Surrey Hills Epic Off-Road Challenge - 17 July 2021 – 125 km, 75 km, 25 km routes

<https://just-pedal.com/surrey-hills-epic/>

<https://www.surreyhills.org/events/surrey-hills-epic-2021/>

London to Brighton Off-Road Bike Ride - 4 September 2021 – 75 miles

<https://www.bhf.org.uk/l2boffroad>

UK's Hardest Hundred Kent & Surrey Hills Epic - 12 September 2021 – 183 km, 104 km routes

<https://hardesthundred.com/uk-sportives/kent-and-surrey-hills-epic/>

<https://www.surreyhills.org/events/uks-hardest-hundred-kent-and-surrey-hills/>

Response:

Dear Sally

Thank you for your question. The Surrey Hills AONB Board acknowledges the concern of residents and local communities about the impact of off-road cycle events that happen across the Surrey Hills as you point out. The AONB Board does not organize any cycle events the listing on the Surrey Hills AONB website contains the following statement and links:

The Surrey Hills AONB Board is not involved in the organising of this event. Our website is used to promote the event and to make residents aware that the event is happening. Please respect the Countryside Code when in the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and follow our cycling safety advice.

it is not accepted that the identified events are classified as races or trials of speed within the meanings of the road traffic acts or the cycle racing on highways regulations 1960. Regardless The regulation of events on public rights of way and other highways falls outside the remit of the Surrey Hills AONB Board. The regulation of events on public rights of way and other highways falls outside the remit of the AONB. Surrey County Council is developing a code of practice for organisers of cycling sportives in Surrey that will be available on the Surrey County Council website.

Published government guidance on the role of National Parks States that:

National Parks are attractive locations for large-scale community, charitable or other events and festivals such as organised charity walks, cycling events, cultural and musical events and fairs. Events should be encouraged which fully engage local communities and visitors, showcase 'greener living', minimise harm to the environment and help to interpret and encourage access to Parks. Such events can be significantly beneficial to achieving Park purposes and deliver economic and social benefits to local communities. Events with the potential to harm the special qualities of a Park, such as caravan and vehicle rallies and large music festivals, will need to be controlled. Authorities should build on their existing experience of working with event organisers to ensure the events programme overall contributes to the sustainable development of Parks and does not harm these special qualities. Parks offer community cohesion and sharing between rural and urban communities.

As such Events can be a means of organising, inspiring and educating 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. For example, the largest such event taking place will be the UK Cycling Ltd Gravel Classic on Sunday 27th June from Loseley Park Estate.

In response to rewilding, the Surrey Hills AONB Board is committed to working with land managers to deliver nature recovery across the Surrey Hills. A visit to the Knepp Estate for our Surrey Hills land managers is being held on Monday 19th July which is fully booked. This is being organized by the facilitators who support the 3 Cluster Groups of landowners, farmers and other land managers. It is ultimately for the respective land managers to determine what options are best for them based on evidence, guidance and securing sustainable investment, including opportunities for environmental land management grants, biodiversity off-setting and carbon capture.

Yours sincerely

Heather Kerswell, Independent Chair

6. John Oliver to ask the Chair:

In pursuing the Surrey Hills Management Plan 'Agricultural Management' policies, the AONB Unit has, for some time, been advising farmers about pollinators. The wasp is a hugely-important pollinator. It is widely accepted that wasp numbers are falling and that this, in addition to the decline in bee numbers, is adding to the threat to the pollination of crops. Wasps are not a pest but make a significant contribution to the natural world and to the benefit of humanity.

Given that each of the constituent borough and district authorities of the Board has discount arrangements with pest controllers for the elimination of wasps from properties, does the Board agree that, as part of its policy commitment, it should use its advisory powers to encourage those local authorities to:

- remove wasps from the list of pests on each local authority's list;
- inform the public of the importance of wasps to the cultivation of crops and the biodiversity of the wild environment;
- advise that wasp nests should be left in place wherever possible until they 'die' naturally in the autumn;
- set out the steps that residents can take to avoid wasps being a nuisance or stinging;

and, if not, why not?"

Response:

Dear John

Thank you for your question.

Local authorities already have a duty to have regard to conserving biodiversity under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. After discussion it is clear that most pest control of the type discussed is connected with domestic and industrial settings for health and safety reasons rather than directly connected to the wider remit of the AONB to conserve and enhance natural beauty.

I suggest that you take this matter up with the Head of Environmental Services at the respective local councils.

Yours sincerely

Heather Kerswell, Independent Chair