



Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan (2019 – 2024)



**Pre-Consultation Draft
For Surrey Hills AONB Board**

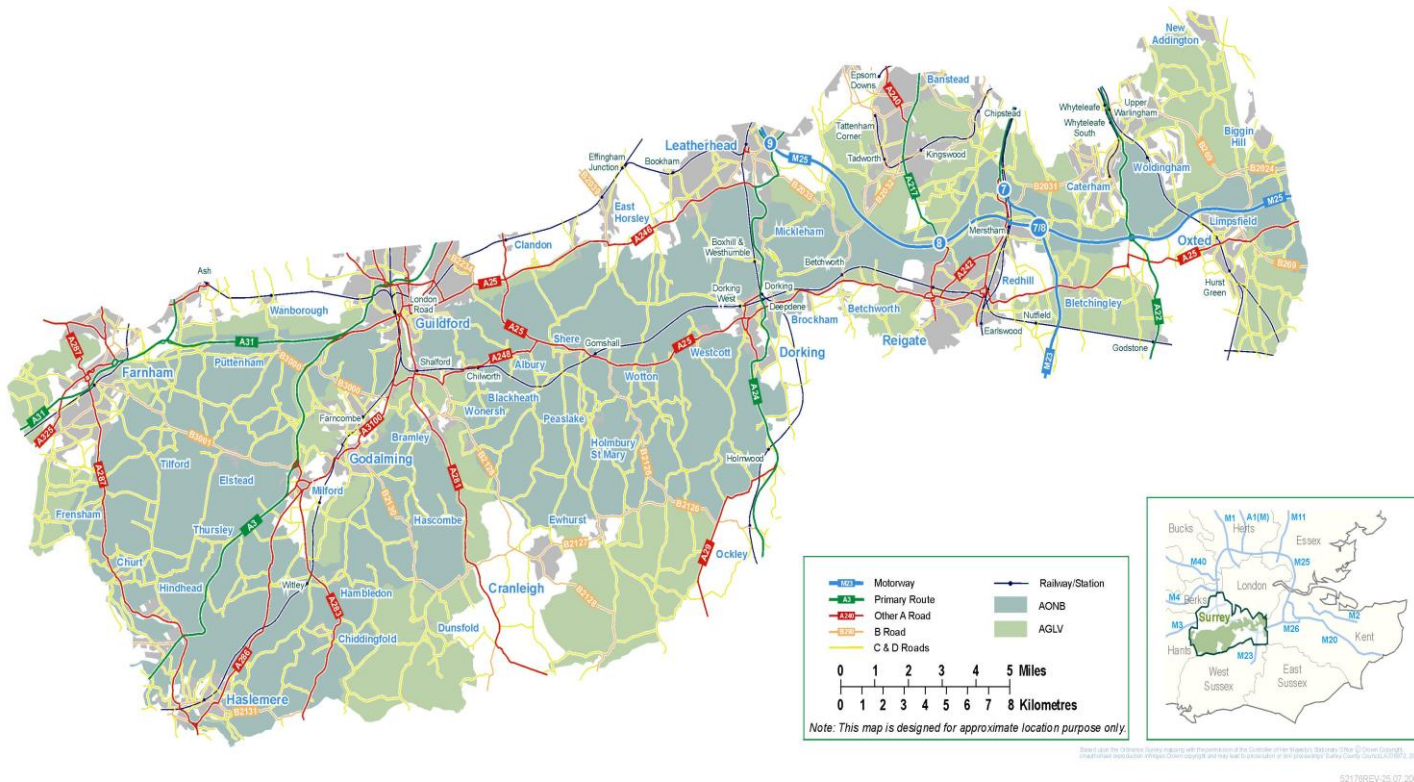
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Preface

The Surrey Hills was one of the first landscapes in the country to be designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1958. It is now one of 37 AONBs in England and has equal status in planning terms to a National Park. The Surrey Hills AONB stretches across rural Surrey, covering about a quarter of the county.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) placed a statutory duty on AONB local authorities to produce and review management plans that will formulate their policy for the management of the area. The Management Plan is being prepared by the Surrey Hills AONB Board and will need to be adopted by Guildford Borough Council, Mole Valley District Council, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, Tandridge District Council, Waverley Borough Council and Surrey County Council.

[To include national and regional context maps]



TO FOLLOW

Ministerial Foreword



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

AONB Board Chairman's Foreword

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Appendices can be found on the web-portal (www.surreyhills.org/ManagementPlan)

SECTION 1: THE INTRODUCTION

1.1 What is the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

The Surrey Hills was one of the first landscapes in the country to be designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1958.. The Surrey Hills AONB stretches across Surrey's North Downs, from Farnham in the west, above Guildford Dorking and Reigate to Oxted in the east of the county. It also includes the Greensand Hills which rise in Haslemere across to Leith Hill, the highest point in Southern England. Its landscape mosaic of farmland, woodland, heaths, downs and commons has inspired some of the country's greatest artists, writers and architects over the centuries. The Surrey Hills attract millions of visitors every year who contribute to the economy of Surrey.

1.2 What is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a designation for an area of land that is of national importance for its natural beauty. The origins of AONBs are in the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949, as is the National Park designation. In June 2000, the Government confirmed that AONBs have the same level of landscape quality and share the same level of protection as National Parks.

The primary purpose of AONB designation is 'to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. All public bodies have a legal duty to 'have regard' to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of an AONB.

1.3 What is the global, national and regional context of the Surrey Hills AONB

The Surrey Hills AONB is one of 46 AONBs in the UK. Together, they cover over 12.5% of the land surface. The distinctive character and natural beauty of AONBs make them some of the most special and cherished places in England. AONBs are living, working landscapes that contribute some £16bn every year to the national economy. Over two thirds of England's population live within half an hour's drive of an AONB; and around 150 million people visit the English AONBs every year, spending in excess of £2bn.5

AONBs are part of the global network of protected landscapes. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources has six management categories covering all types of protected areas. Our AONBs and National Parks fall into Category V – landscapes managed mainly for conservation and recreation.

As a protected landscape, the Surrey Hills AONB is playing a key role in the implementation of the European Landscape Convention, ratified by the UK in 2006. The Convention aims to improve the protection and management of important landscapes and to increase co-operation across Europe. The Surrey Hills AONB Board is an active member of the National Association for AONBs and through this works with other AONBs across the country.

1.3 The Statutory AONB Management Plan

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are designated by the Government for the purpose of ensuring that the special qualities of the finest landscapes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are conserved and enhanced. The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area, as confirmed by Section 82 of the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000* (CRoW Act).

AONBs are unique and irreplaceable national assets. There are 37 AONBs in England, covering 15% of the land area, and a further 4 in Wales and 8 (on a different legislative basis) in Northern Ireland. They range in size from the Isles of Scilly (16 km²) to the Cotswolds (2038 km²).

The Government has confirmed that the landscape qualities of National Parks and AONBs are equivalent, so the protection given by the land use planning system to natural beauty in both types of area should also be equivalent. The AONB designation is also of international importance, recognised as a Category V Protected Landscape by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Sections 88 and 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) state that each local authority and Conservation Board must prepare and publish a Management Plan for their AONB, which must then be reviewed at intervals of no more than five years. AONB Management Plans are an adopted statutory policy of the local authorities.

Additional responsibilities are placed on local authorities and the planning system:

- AONBs are defined within the EIA Regulations for specific consideration as a “sensitive area”.
- The CRoW Act Section 85 Duty of Regard requires all public bodies, down to parish council level, to consider the AONBs nationally protected status in any land use related decisions. This includes planning applications and the formulation of Local and Neighbourhood Plans.
- AONB Management Plans have been recognised to form a ‘material consideration’ in the planning decision making process.
- Land within AONBs is recognised differently under the Town and Country Planning Act as Article 1(5) land (which for example restricts certain permitted development rights).

As well as formulating the policy of local authorities in relation to their AONBs, AONB Management Plans are intended to:

- highlight the special qualities and the enduring significance of the AONB and the importance of its landscape, wildlife and cultural heritage, identifying those features that are vulnerable to change
- present an integrated vision for the future of the AONB as a whole, in the light of national, regional and local priorities, regardless of administrative boundaries
- set out agreed policies which will help secure that vision
- identify what needs to be done, by whom and when, in order to achieve these objectives
- stimulate action aimed at helping people to discover, enjoy and understand the local landscape and its natural and cultural features
- identify actions which will support those economic and social activities which in themselves contribute to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty.

The AONB Management Plan is not intended to be a panacea for all the perceived problems which local communities might face, nor is it intended to duplicate or replace other statutory plans which affect the area. It is, however, the only document with a focus on the whole of the AONB and the only one that is primarily focused on the purpose of AONB designation, which is the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty.

1.3 How will the AONB Management Plan be prepared?

This Management Plan is being prepared by the Surrey Hills AONB Board, a Joint Committee, on behalf of the six local authorities that have a statutory duty to adopt the Plan. The AONB Unit was supported in this work by members of the AONB’s Officers Working Group, Partnership Members and people from a wide range of conservation, land management, tourism and other organisations. It was also informed by reviewing the existing AONB Management Plan (2014 – 2019), which was the subject of wide consultation, including a Strategic Environmental Assessment that was reviewed as part of this process.

The Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan is one of a national family of Plans. It reflects best practice in Management Plan following advice and guidance through sharing information within the National Association for AONBs. For more information on AONBs visit the National Association for AONBs website: www.landscapesforlife.org.uk

1.4 The relationship with the National Planning Policy Framework

The primary legislation in relation to AONB designation is from the CRoW Act (2000) and originally from the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. The amount of policy relating to AONBs has reduced greatly since the removal of Structure Plans and abolition of the Regional Spatial Strategies. Policy for AONBs is now solely contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Local Plans and emerging Neighbourhood Plans.

The National Planning Policy Framework 2018, confirms the requirement in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 that planning applications should be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The NPPF provides specific planning guidance for plan makers and decision takers in relation to AONBs and confirms (para 172) that: *“Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.”* It goes on to state that *“the scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited”*.

AONBs and their Management Plans are material considerations in the planning system. The ‘great weight test’ is significant and one of the most stringent legal tests that can be applied under planning law. In specific relation to major development the NPPF states that planning permission should be refused for major developments in AONBs except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. It then sets a series of tests that have to be assessed in relation to major development. What constitutes ‘major development’ has not been defined. But the NPPF states that it *“is a matter for the decision maker taking into account its nature, scale and setting and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined”*.

It should be recognised that the “presumption in favour of sustainable development” in the NPPF does not apply within AONBs as confirmed by paragraph 11 footnote 6 of the NPPF, due to the other policies relating to AONBs elsewhere within the Framework.

The NPPF confirms that local planning authorities should set out the strategic priorities for their areas within Local Plans and accordingly deliver the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment, including landscape. The NPPF also confirms that allocations of land for development should prefer land of lesser environmental value (counting the AONB as the highest value), that local planning authorities should set criteria based policies against which proposals for any development on or affecting landscape areas will be judged (development affecting AONBs includes impact on their setting), and that planning should contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment.

Local and Neighbourhood Plans should set out policy for AONBs locally and define the special qualities of the area. This should include policy reference in Core Strategies and in specific Development Plan Documents (DPD) as relevant, and should specifically cross reference the relevant AONB Management Plan. Further to this the existence of an AONB designation should be considered at the very outset in Local Plan preparation and should influence the Local Plan in terms of the strategic location of development, access issues, green infrastructure, Community Infrastructure Levy, use of natural resources, and in terms of landscape and environmental protection. Simply including a single policy reference to AONBs does not demonstrate that LPAs have met their legal duty under Section 85 of the CROW Act to have proper regard to the purposes of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB.

1.5 The implications of a Surrey Hills AONB Boundary Review

Significant parts of the Surrey countryside adjacent to the AONB are designated at a county level as Areas of Great Landscape Value (AGLV). These areas have acted as a buffer to the AONB but they also have their own inherent landscape quality and are significant in conserving the landscape setting of some towns. Although AGLV land is not a national designation, previous Surrey Hills AONB Management Plans recognised the importance of AGLV land in protecting the integrity of the Surrey Hills AONB landscape, particularly views to and from the AONB. The application of the Management Plan policies and actions to AGLV land has been instrumental in helping to conserve and enhance the Surrey Hills.

In October 2013, the Surrey Hills AONB Board formally requested that Natural England consider modifying the AONB boundary. In 1958 the Surrey Hills AONB was the second landscape to be designated an AONB, and there has never been a review of the boundary. A purpose of the review will be to establish whether land designated at a County level as Areas of Great Landscape Value should be included in the AONB.

Following a comprehensive landscape character assessment of the AONB and AGLV land, candidate areas that meet the AONB criteria have been identified. In February 2014, Natural England agreed to progress a Modification Order. It is anticipated that this process will take about two to three years to progress. The aim will be to generate a consensus on the land to be included in the AONB, particularly amongst the six AONB local authorities, in order to reduce any need for a lengthy and expensive Public Inquiry.

1.6 Defining the ‘Natural Beauty’ of the Surrey Hills AONB

“Natural Beauty is not just the look of the landscape but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries”¹. Dr Nicola Bannister, landscape historian, has stated “The term ‘natural’ in the designation title is a misnomer as no part of the Surrey Hills is ‘natural’ in the wild sense; rather it is less intensively managed compared with other parts of Surrey, retaining landscape features and semi-natural habitats which have a high ecological diversity and interest.”²

Although the Surrey Hills is now one of the most wooded of the nationally protected areas in the country, it is still an intriguingly diverse landscape characterised by hills and valleys, traditional mixed farming, a patchwork of chalk grassland and heathland, sunken lanes, picturesque villages and market towns. It has associations with many of the country’s great artists, writers, musicians and designers. It is often regarded as the first real countryside south of London and is a rural retreat for many thousands of daily commuters.

The Hills stretch across the chalk North Downs that run from Farnham in the west, above Guildford, Dorking and Reigate, to Oxted in the east. They contain a mosaic of woodland, scrub and open downland with combes, spring lines, chalk pits, quarries and striking cliffs. To the south are the Greensand Hills that include Black Down, the Devil’s Punch Bowl and Leith Hill, with ancient sunken lanes and geometric fields that have been enclosed from heaths and wooded commons. In between are the valleys of the Wey, Tillingbourne and Mole rivers, and the heaths of Frensham, Thursley and Blackheath. The Low Weald forms the southern fringe of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, with its extensive woodlands and small irregular fields, hedgerows and wooded shaws.

Although geology, soils and climate have created the bones of the landscape, the appearance of the Surrey Hills has been shaped for centuries by the changing patterns of land use and settlement. Over much of the Surrey Hills the historic settlement pattern remains largely intact: small picturesque villages of Saxon and medieval origin in the valleys; isolated farmsteads on chalk slopes, valley bottoms and in clearings won from the woodland; large country houses with extensive parklands; market towns; and remnants of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century industry.

The consultation on this Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan will seek feedback on the features that define the special character of the Surrey Hills. On the website portal, a statement of significance and the threats and pressures are identified for the following features:

- Views
- Woodland
- Heathland
- Tranquillity
- Commons
- Chalk grassland
- Country lanes
- Farmland
- Historic buildings
- Parkland

1.7 The Landscape Character of the Surrey Hills AONB

The Surrey Hills Landscape Character Assessment (2008) identified 13 local landscape character areas. For each area the AONB Management Plan includes a Statement of Significance; identifies the key AONB features; and the key local issues for each area. This assessment has helped to inform the Management Plan Policies and the Strategy to target action to certain parts of the AONB. Further information on the following Landscape Character Areas can be found on the website Management Plan portal. These will be updated

¹ Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A Guide for AONB Partnership Members, Countryside Agency, 2001 (CA 24))

² Surrey Hills AONB: Historic landscape descriptions, Dr Nicola R Bannister, July 2002 (unpublished)

with the new Landscape Character Assessment that has been undertaken as part of the AONB Boundary Review evidence base:

The North Downs: The Hog's Back and Puttenham Vale
The North Downs: Ranmore and Hackhurst Downs
The North Downs: The Mole Gap
The North Downs: Scarp and Holmesdale
Greensand Valley: The Upper Wey
Greensand Valley: Pippbrook and Tillingbourne
Greensand Plateau: Shackleford
Greensand Plateau: Witley and Churt
Greensand Hills: Hindhead
Greensand Hills and Wooded Weald: Hascombe
Greensand Hills: Leith Hill
Wooded Weald: Chiddingfold
Wooded Weald: Womersley to Holmwood

1.8 The consultation on this Plan will seek views on the activities associated with the Surrey Hills. The following were identified through the consultation process in the previous Plan consultation:

- Walking
- Dog walking
- Visit to pub, restaurant, tea rooms etc
- Horse riding
- Mountain biking
- Road cycling
- Photography
- Visiting attractions
- Leisure drive
- Shopping
- Running

1.9 The key pressures and threats:

Many changes have taken place since the Surrey Hills was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1958. Although it is still a beautiful and protected area, and despite being contained wholly within the London Metropolitan Green Belt, the threats and pressures on its special character and the vitality of its communities have come in many forms. The following key pressures and threats were identified through the previous consultation process in the following order:

- Housing development
- Off road vehicles
- Energy (oil, gas, fracking)
- Loss of local services
- Excavation of minerals
- Changes in agriculture
- Aircraft noise
- Climate change
- Mountain biking
- Road cycling

These pressures are the result of the great many environmental, social and economic forces that are often external to the Surrey Hills AONB. Although it is recognised that it will be difficult to address these pressures in the Management Plan, a purpose of the Plan is to ensure that the impact of these forces on the Surrey Hills is recognised and that competent authorities exercise their duty to

conserve and enhance the AONB by having regard to the AONB Management Plan policies as set out in Section 2.

1.10 How does the management plan fit with other policies and plans?

European, national and local policies and plans already provide a considerable level of protection for the natural and scenic beauty of the AONB. In addition, the strategies and plans prepared by a wide range of partner organisations deal with many other issues that affect the area. These include the management of transport, tourism, recreation, geodiversity and biodiversity.

These policies, plans and strategies inform the AONB management plan, which, in turn, will influence other key policies, plans and processes affecting the area. This would cover, for example, Development Plans, Neighbourhood Development Plans, Transport Plans and Green Infrastructure Strategies.

1.11 Monitoring the Condition of the Surrey Hills AONB

Monitoring the condition of the Surrey Hills AONB will play an important role in identifying the key issues and in assessing the appropriateness and effectiveness of Management Plan policies. The establishment of a monitoring mechanism through the use of simple but meaningful Surrey Hills AONB headline indicators provides a means of assessing and communicating change over time to inform the five-yearly reviews of the Plan. The headline indicators for the Surrey Hills are each related to achieving the vision statements that in turn relate to the character of the landscape and the enjoyment and understanding of it, and thus to the purposes of the designation.

A State of the Surrey Hills AONB Report will be prepared by the Surrey Hills Board. This report will provide baseline data for each of the headline indicators; details for the rationale that underlies each of the indicators; the data sources and monitoring systems that will be used and links to other targets and indicators like the Local Transport Plan.

1.12 Reviewing the AONB Management Plan

The Surrey Hills Management Plan is required under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CroW) 2000 to be reviewed at intervals not less than every five years after its publication. The review process is planned to start in 2022 to produce a plan to cover the period 2024 - 2029. The preparation of the new Plan will be informed by the monitoring of the implementation of this Plan, and an assessment of the condition of the Surrey Hills AONB with the preparation of the State of the Surrey Hills report. The new Plan for 2019 - 2024 will summarise the achievements in the preceding five years. The Plan will also review the planning and policy context and provide an opportunity for widespread consultation on the key issues the new plan needs to address.

The decision to pursue the modification of the AONB boundary will have a significant impact on the review process, but such a process is expected to take two to three years to complete. It is therefore expected that the implications of a reviewed AONB will be consolidated within the next AONB Management Plan 2024 – 2029, but this will be kept under review during the course of this AONB Management Plan and Government advice.

SECTION 2: THE POLICIES

2.1 Introduction

All public bodies, including local authorities, Government agencies, and statutory undertakers must, in accordance with Section 85 of the Countryside and Right of Way (CroW) Act 2000, have “due regard” to the purposes of AONB designation in the carrying out of their functions. The policies in this Plan will guide them in the fulfilment of their duty under the Act.

2.2 Statement of Significance

In guiding the policies the Management Plan includes the following statement which states the value of the Surrey Hills AONB:

The Surrey Hills AONB is one of England’s finest landscapes, equivalent in beauty to a National Park and designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1958.

Its landscape mosaic of farmland, woodland, heaths, downs and commons has inspired some of the country’s greatest artists, writers and architects over the centuries. The Surrey Hills attract millions of visitors every year who contribute to the economy of the area in sectors as diverse as wine production and wood fuel.

The Hills are protected as part of London’s Metropolitan Green Belt and provide an outstanding natural resource for London and Surrey residents to enjoy outdoor pursuits, taste local food and explore market towns and picture postcard perfect villages.

2.3 The Vision

The purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve the natural beauty of the landscape. Yet the landscape, along with the rest of the English countryside, is not just a result of natural forces. It is constantly evolving as a result of the many social and economic forces placed upon it. The vision for the Surrey Hills recognises that the landscape will change but it needs to ensure that it changes in a way that conserves and enhances its special qualities. In doing so, it also needs to maintain the social and economic viability of the Surrey Hills in a sustainable manner.

The following long term vision statement sets the context and guides the Management Plan policies:

The Surrey Hills AONB is recognised as a national asset in which its natural and cultural resources 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.

2.4 Agriculture

The beauty of the Surrey Hills is largely the result of the way the land has been shaped and maintained by farmers, landowners and estate managers over the centuries. This has created a beautiful mosaic landscape of small to large fields enclosed by hedgerows, shaws and copses, with traditional farm buildings. Having a viable and diverse farming economy reduces the pressure to fragment the landscape, which then becomes more vulnerable to development and inappropriate management.

The high land and labour prices, together with the depression in agricultural incomes, create a massive pressure to give up farming, to intensify production or to diversify into activities that may not necessarily protect and enhance the special character of the area. The Surrey Farm Study 2014 highlighted the pressures that farming is under in Surrey but there are new opportunities to diversify, particularly into viticulture which could have a major impact on the landscape, the rural economy and new ways to enhance biodiversity.

With the Government's commitment to new environmental land management schemes following the planned exit from the European Union, the Plan seeks to ensure that farming remains a viable enterprise in the Surrey Hills and continues to play a positive role in maintaining its outstanding landscape. This means raising awareness of the important role that farmers play, supporting them as custodians of the landscape, and exploiting commercial opportunities to capitalise on the millions of people who cherish the Surrey Hills as a place to live, work and visit.

Aim: Agriculture plays a positive role in maintaining the outstanding and diverse character of the Surrey Hills

Agricultural Management Policies:

- F1 Farming as a viable and sustainable enterprise, within and adjacent to the AONB, will be encouraged and supported through the development of local produce initiatives to ensure that it contributes to the management of land, biodiversity and landscape character.
- F2 Advice and financial assistance will be targeted to farmers and land managers through Government schemes to ensure the maintenance and enhancement of traditional landscape features.
- F3 Farm diversification schemes will be supported where they help to maintain and enhance the special landscape character of the AONB *and have a demonstrable, positive amenity impact*, and contribute to the vitality of the Surrey Hills economy, particularly supporting tourism and leisure.
- F4 A wider understanding and awareness of agricultural practice will be promoted where this encourages and supports the creation and maintenance of the outstanding landscape character of the Surrey Hills.

State of the AONB Indicators for Agriculture:

- Area of land in registered agricultural use and average farm holding size
- Area of agricultural land in agri-environment schemes

2.5 Woodland

The Surrey Hills is one of the most wooded National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the country with approximately 40% woodland cover. Its character varies from the patchwork of irregular woods, old coppice and shaws of the Wooded Weald, the conifer plantations of large estates on the Greensand Hills, to the ancient yew and box woodlands on the North Downs. The 1947 woodland census suggests that the Surrey Hills landscape has changed from a predominantly open landscape with coppiced woodland to a landscape with largely unmanaged secondary woodlands extending onto former commons, heathland and downland.

The major threats to the woodland habitats in the 21st century arise from their fragmentation and loss, lack of management and inappropriate planting of non-native species. Small woodland ownership has increased within the Surrey Hills but many owners are unaware of what management should be undertaken. Although the Management Plan consultation demonstrated the great value that people attach to woodlands, the consequences of fragmentation and neglect include the loss of biodiversity and a perception that woodland is of little use and therefore little value. In addition, the uncontrolled expansion of woodland and scrub can be at the expense of other more important semi-natural habitats, particularly heathland and chalk downland. Woodlands are also prone to disease and climate change, which could potentially have a major impact on the Surrey Hills landscape.

The Management Plan policies seek to raise awareness and understanding amongst the public and small woodland owners of the value of woodlands and the need for management. There need to be financial incentives to cover the cost of management through well-resourced and targeted grant schemes. New markets for woodland products need to be developed, such as opportunities to work with local saw mills on added value products for craft related uses, highway signs and fencing. There is a particular opportunity in the Surrey Hills area to develop wood fuel projects and build on the success of the annual Wood Fair through Surrey Hills Enterprises.

Aim: Woodlands are sustainably managed and linked to conserve and enhance the landscape, ecological, archaeological and recreational value of the wider Surrey Hills landscape

Woodland Management Policies

- W1 Woodland owners and managers will be supported to manage all ancient woodlands, and other woodlands that contribute to the landscape character.
- W2 Markets for timber and other forest products will be identified, promoted and supported in order to generate incomes to help sustain appropriate woodland management.
- W3 To promote the wider importance of woodlands and the need for management, including disease and adapting to climate change through the felling, replanting and coppicing of trees.
- W4 To promote the benefits of removing inappropriate trees and secondary woodland, particularly for the restoration of heathland and chalk grassland to improve biodiversity and the reinstatement of views.
- W5 Opportunities will be taken to extend and link woodland / hedgerow habitats for landscape, nature conservation, recreation and educational purposes.

State of the AONB Indicators for Woodland:

- Area of Ancient Woodland and other important woodland under positive management
- Area of woodland cover

2.6 Biodiversity

The Surrey Hills is an area rich and diverse in wildlife due to its varied geology, landform and traditional land management. It contains internationally important sites for nature conservation ranging from the extensive lowland heaths on the Greensand to the chalk grassland and yew and box woodlands on the North Downs. The Surrey Hills landscape also contains an important matrix of smaller features like hedgerows, shelterbelts, woodland coppice and ponds.

The Management Plan consultation highlighted the need for robust policies and regulation to protect designated sites. There were, however, comments that more should be done beyond designated sites, including opportunities to adapt to climate change and link habitats. The fragmentation and general decline in traditional land management practices has led to a tremendous pressure on maintaining the rich biodiversity of the Surrey Hills. There is often little public awareness and understanding of the need for appropriate management, particularly grazing, and there is a general lack of resources to coordinate and implement positive management regimes.

The Management Plan policies seek to enhance the biodiversity of the area through sustaining the management and extension of the designated sites and important features in the wider AONB landscape. This involves promoting awareness, and generating resources for practical land management through new environmental land management schemes and biodiversity off-setting. There is also the need to ensure collaboration between landowners and land managers, and partner organisations through the Surrey Nature Partnership and farm clusters.

Aim: The biodiversity of the Surrey Hills is conserved and enhanced

Biodiversity Management Policies:

- B1 Existing designated sites (SSSIs, SPAs and SACs) will be conserved, enhanced and managed by Natural England and partners, and where possible improved in line with government targets.
- B2 Important habitats, such as chalk grassland and heathland, will be managed and used in ways that conserve and enhance their nature conservation value.
- B3 Opportunities will be taken to extend and link habitats for landscape, nature conservation, recreation or for educational purposes, with the creation of new habitats and corridors informed by landscape character to establish functional ecological networks with resilience to climate change.
- B4 The enhancement of the biodiversity of important habitats will be maximised through the targeting of advice and grants, and through the negotiation of planning agreements, where appropriate.
- B5 Measures will be implemented to conserve and enhance the ecological value of river landscapes, wetland habitats and water quality affecting the environmental quality and landscape of the Surrey Hills.

State of the AONB Indicators for Biodiversity:

- Extent and condition of designated areas (SSSI, SAC, SPA, RIGS, SNCI)
- Extent and condition of habitats of principal importance as listed in Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006.

2.7 Historic and Cultural Heritage

The beautiful landscape features of the Surrey Hills, particularly the historic buildings, settlements, country lanes, hedgerows, parkland, commons, heath and downland, provide evidence of a rich historic and cultural past. This is a landscape that has provided inspiration to many of the country's great artists, writers, designers and architects, particularly during and since Victorian times. Village greens and commons are highly favoured recreational areas for local people and visitors alike.

The consultation on the Management Plan highlighted a general sense that the historic and cultural heritage of the Surrey Hills is greatly under appreciated, particularly the artistic associations and industrial heritage. There is also a lack of awareness of how the landscape has evolved and the inspiration that it has provided. There has also been a general loss of local distinctiveness and traditional rural character through the decline in traditional land management practices and the standardisation of design and materials.

The Management Plan seeks to ensure that the historic features and the rich cultural heritage that define the special sense of place are recorded, protected, managed and celebrated by present and future generations. The Delivery Strategy identifies the need for partnership working, including through the Surrey Hills Society and the Surrey Archaeological Society with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Aim: The historic and cultural heritage that defines the distinctive sense of place within the Surrey Hills is recorded, protected, managed and celebrated

Historic and Cultural Heritage Management Policies

- HC1 A wider understanding of how the Surrey Hills landscape has evolved will be achieved by promoting the interpretation of the AONB including the links between geology and landscape.
- HC2 Heritage assets, including historic buildings, archaeological sites and historic parks and gardens, will be conserved, managed and recorded.
- HC3 Development proposals will have due regard to the locally distinctive character of rural settlements and the setting of historic buildings.
- HC4 The rich artistic and industrial heritage of the Surrey Hills will be promoted. New work will be commissioned with the involvement of local communities to keep land management traditions alive.

State of the AONB Indicators for Historic and Cultural Heritage:

- Number and condition of registered historic parks and gardens, and local historic gardens and historic landscapes of interest.
- Number (%) of listed buildings “at risk”

2.8 Recreation and Tourism

Introduction

Some of the most familiar beauty spots in England are found within the Surrey Hills, including Box Hill, Leith Hill and the Devil's Punch Bowl. With the North Downs Way National Trail and the extensive rights of way, open commons, sunken lanes, easy access, picnic sites, attractive market towns and villages, it has been a favourite playground for local people and visitors keen to enjoy the fresh air and outstanding scenery.

Although little information exists about the current number and profile of visitors, there is little doubt that the area receives millions of day visitors every year. The consultation on the Management Plan highlighted the conflict between promoting the Surrey Hills as a national asset against the primary purpose of the designation that is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. Visitors can place a great strain on the area and can lead to conflict between users and local communities, particularly ones with popular village greens such as Tilford and Abinger. Visitors may also add to the congestion of traffic and enhance the erosion of footpaths and bridleways as well as the peace and tranquillity of the area.

The Management Plan seeks to recognise that the Surrey Hills, as a nationally important landscape, is managed so that local people and visitors have the opportunity to enjoy the area in a way that has minimal impact on its beauty and the lives of its residents. There is the opportunity for Surrey Hills Enterprises and tourism partnerships, like Visit Surrey and the National Trails' Great Walks project, to ensure that the spending power of visitors contributes significantly to the local economy, including linking local food to tourism, and that visitor facilities also enhance local people's enjoyment and understanding of the Surrey Hills AONB.

Aim: The Surrey Hills will be enjoyed and cherished as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty for its own intrinsic qualities and in ways that contribute to the local economy and that are sensitive to the impact on local communities and the environment

Recreation and Tourism Management Plan Policies

- RT1 Visitors and visitor facilities will be encouraged where they benefit the local economy and enhance people's health, enjoyment and understanding of the Surrey Hills, whilst respecting the landscape character and biodiversity.
- RT2 Information about recreation and tourism in the Surrey Hills will be made accessible to a diverse range of potential visitors through a wide range of media in order to foster a greater understanding of the AONB and its considerate use.
- RT3 Significant viewpoints will be identified, conserved and enhanced. The planning authorities will seek to protect and safeguard access to significant views.
- RT4 The design and development of new visitor facilities, and the maintenance of existing facilities, will have regard to the needs of people of all abilities to access and enjoy the Surrey Hills landscape.
- RT5 The Surrey Hills will be promoted as a destination for sustainable tourism and recreation.
- RT6 The quiet enjoyment of the Surrey Hills will be protected. Recreational activities which threaten these qualities will be assessed and suitable management measures implemented in order to minimise danger to other users, damage to the environment, reduce the inconvenience to local residents and ensuring that there are tangible benefits to local communities, including the local economy.'

State of the AONB Indicators for Recreation and Tourism:

- Number and range of high quality access opportunities that meet the needs of all users
- The number and profile of tourism businesses

2.9 Land Use Planning

The prime purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve and enhance the natural and scenic beauty of the landscape. However, the Surrey Hills is not a museum, and development may need to take place from time to time in response to the needs of society, both local and wider. A fundamental role of the local planning authorities is to ensure that the very features that make the Surrey Hills special and worthy of its AONB designation are protected. This is achieved by strict development plan policies and through the vigilant exercise of development management powers. This Plan seeks to ensure that both are applied in a consistent manner across the AONB. Development proposals should take into account any Landscape Character Assessments for the locality and the Surrey Hills publication “Building in Design”.

Being so close to London and other urban areas means there are significant development pressures on the Surrey Hills landscape. These pressures are expected to increase and justify especially stringent controls of development. The cumulative effects of many, often small, developments over decades and centuries would reduce the landscape and scenic beauty of the Surrey Hills and spoil it for future generations. These and other pressures and threats outlined in Section 1.8 are considered to justify the policies below for strict controls of development in this most sensitive of landscapes. The increasing impact of replacement buildings in parts of the Surrey Hills is an issue. Special care needs to be taken over their siting, volume and design to ensure that their impact on the landscape does not become progressively greater over the years and takes into account any previous building enlargement.

It will be for each constituent Planning Authority to determine whether a proposed development constitutes major development for the purposes of applying paragraph 116 of the National Planning Policy Framework, taking into account the proposal in question, the local context and any Government definition of major development. Where appropriate, the need for a major development should be demonstrated and any overriding public benefit arising from it.

In seeking to identify in development plans sufficient land to meet Councils’ future housing requirements, any proposed housing land allocations directly, or possibly indirectly, impacting upon the AONB should be avoided and be shown to be a last resort. Any such proposals will need to demonstrate that other sites have been investigated but would have greater adverse effects on the public interest.

Aim: New development enhances local character and the environmental quality of its nationally important setting

Land Use Planning Management Policies:

- LU1 In balancing different considerations associated with determining planning applications and development plan land allocations, great weight will be attached to any adverse impact that a development proposal would have on the amenity, landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB.
- LU2 Development will respect the special landscape character of the locality, giving particular attention to potential impacts on ridgelines, public views, tranquillity and light pollution. The proposed use and colour of external building materials will be strictly controlled to avoid buildings being conspicuous in the landscape.
- LU3 Development proposals will be required to be of high quality design, respecting local distinctiveness and be complementary in form, setting, and scale with their surroundings, and should take any opportunities to enhance their setting.
- LU4 Proposals that would assist in the continuation of direct agricultural and forestry businesses or benefit the social and economic well being of residents, including small scale affordable housing, will be supported, providing they do not conflict with the aim of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape.
- LU5 Development that would spoil the setting of the AONB, by harming public views into or from the AONB, will be resisted.

State of the AONB Indicators for Land Use Planning:

- Any changes in development impact on the landscape and area under built development

2.10 Transport and Traffic

The Surrey Hills has historically been an accessible landscape well served by rail, road and an extensive network of footpaths and bridleways. Many of the important and distinctive features of the Surrey Hills are associated with transport. These include sunken lanes, traditional signs, boundary walls and fences, and the general use of local materials, such as ironstone paving and sandstone kerbs.

As Surrey has a higher level of car ownership than any other county, the impact of traffic on the Surrey Hills is perhaps greater than on any other AONB or National Park. This is largely due to its close proximity to London and other urban areas, resulting in high volumes of traffic passing through the area. The consultation on the Management Plan highlighted the blight caused by major transport infrastructure such as the M25 and M23, and also highlighted that the Surrey Hills has become a key destination for cycling. The increasing volume of traffic leads to a loss of tranquillity, damage to features like verges, and the introduction of highway engineering solutions that can detract from the rural character of the area. The relatively high car ownership contrasts with a lack of convenient public and community transport.

The Management Plan aims to raise awareness of the impact that traffic has on the Surrey Hills and to promote measures that reinforce the rural character of the area through sensitive design and maintenance. There is also a need to provide safe and convenient non-motorised access by working with rail and bus operators and through initiatives to promote walking, cycling and horse riding for people who live in, work in or visit the Surrey Hills.

Aim: Transport measures reinforce the rural character of the area and provide for a range of safe and sustainable travel alternatives

Traffic and Transport Management Policies:

- | | |
|-----|--|
| TT1 | Sensitive measures appropriate to the AONB will be supported to influence the behaviour of road users for the safe use and enjoyment of rural roads. |
| TT2 | Measures to ensure equal opportunities to access the Surrey Hills by train, bus, cycle, horse and on foot will be implemented. |
| TT3 | Transport infrastructure, associated landscape design and verge management will respect the local landscape quality, character and biodiversity. |
| TT4 | Major transport schemes will have due regard to the national AONB designation and measures will be taken to reduce any impact on the Surrey Hills landscape. |

State of the AONB Indicators for Traffic and Transport:

- Type, amount and quality of road signs, kerbs and road furniture
- Area of road verge managed positively for biodiversity

2.11 Community Development and the Local Economy

The appearance of the Surrey Hills today is largely the result of the way people have settled in the area and worked the land over the centuries. This activity has contributed to the special and diverse character that makes the Surrey Hills such an attractive area in which to live, work and visit. The area is a major economic asset to the County and the Region. A recent Defra study (2013 unpublished), by Professor Peter Bibby of the University of Sheffield, has identified the Surrey Hills as an "Elite Residential Enclave" in the country with 43.1% of dwellings in the AONB having a registered company director in residence.

Being a generally prosperous and attractive area means high land and property values often undermine the viability of rural businesses such as farming and village shops. These businesses help maintain the landscape and community life. This relative prosperity also means that local people who do not have access to everyday facilities, jobs or a car can be excluded from participating fully in the community.

Although there was concern expressed in the Management Plan consultation that the aim and policies for Community Development and the Local Economy were considered to have a general presumption in favour of development, the aim is to make the link between the community, its quality of life and the Surrey Hills environment. This means ensuring that the protection and enhancement of the environmental quality of the AONB leads to the advantage of the Surrey Hills being an attractive and affordable place to live in, invest in and visit for all members of the community. Particular regard needs to be given to promoting those sustainable forms of social and economic development, such as affordable housing and the development of local food initiatives, which in themselves contribute to conserving the environment by generating income for land management and reducing the need to travel.

Aim: The Surrey Hills should be an attractive, affordable and sustainable place to live, work and enjoy for all members of the local community

Local Economy and Community Management Policies:

- CD1 The relationship between the towns, villages and the special qualities of the Surrey Hills AONB will be strengthened to support local businesses and access to services.
- CD2 The provision and retention of affordable housing for local people and labour force will be supported.
- CD3 Affordable and reliable community transport and infrastructure for recreation, employment and access to local services will be supported.
- CD4 Opportunities to develop land management and conservation skills through vocational training, volunteer work and paid employment will be identified and actively promoted.
- CD5 Greater awareness of the Surrey Hills AONB will be supported through the Surrey Hills Society in order to foster a pride of place that encourages action to protect, enhance and enjoy its landscape.

State of AONB Indicators for Community Development & Local Economy:

- Community involvement and awareness in the conservation and enhancement of the AONB
- Number and access to community transport schemes

SECTION 3: THE DELIVERY STRATEGY

3.1 Introduction

It is intended that the policies set out in the AONB Management Plan will be embraced and acted upon by all those organisations that have a role to play in the management of the Surrey Hills landscape and the well being of its local communities. This includes landowners, voluntary organisations, interest groups, local authorities, parish councils, statutory agencies, regional Local Enterprise Partnerships and Government departments.

It is recognised that many ongoing activities of partners already help to contribute to the Management Plan policies. This section of the AONB Management Plan however provides a strategy that identifies specific opportunities for partners to work together to help translate their commitment to the vision and policies into practical action.

3.2 The Surrey Hills AONB Board

The Surrey Hills AONB Board is a Joint Committee that leads on the preparation, monitoring and review of the AONB Management Plan on behalf of its constituent bodies and other partner organisations. The AONB Board also plays a leading role in developing an image and sense of identity for the Surrey Hills AONB, and developing and supporting initiatives that implement the AONB Management Plan policies.

The work of the AONB Board is achieved through the Surrey Hills AONB Unit taking forward a range of initiatives by promoting the special character of the Surrey Hills, establishing partnerships, securing funding, ensuring implementation and monitoring effectiveness. In recognition that the Surrey Hills AONB is a nationally important landscape, 75% of the Unit's core costs are funded by central government through Defra with 25% of core costs from the six local authorities in regard to their statutory duties related to the AONB.

3.3 The NAAONB and the purpose of the AONB Family

The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) is a charity that provides a strong collective voice for the UK's 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). Its objectives are to

- promote the conservation and enhancement of AONBs,
- advance the education, understanding and appreciation by the public of AONBs, and
- promote the efficiency and effectiveness of those promoting or representing AONBs, other protected areas and those areas for which designation might be pursued.

It does this by taking a collaborative and partnership-based approach to working with its membership and other organisations at a national level to achieve shared goals.

Charity members are involved in the planning and management of around 8,000 square miles of outstanding and cherished landscapes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Membership includes most of the AONB partnerships, as well as some of those Local Authorities with statutory responsibility for AONBs, together with a number of voluntary

3.4 Progress in delivering the last AONB Management Plan (2014 – 2019)

The website portal includes a report on the implementation of the last AONB Management Plan Action Plan. It is grouped into the following broad areas to reflect the purpose of the AONB designation:

Landscape Conservation and Enhancement: To support landowners and managers on achieving practical action to protect and enhance the special features of the Surrey Hills.

Enjoyment and Understanding: To raise awareness of the Surrey Hills AONB to ensure its special qualities are identified, protected and enhanced, and to provide information on environmentally responsible recreation opportunities for residents and visitors.

Developing the Surrey Hills Economy: To promote action that supports the economic and social well-being of the area, particularly in relation to supporting land management and visitor based enterprises.

Partnership and Coordination: To ensure that the Management Plan policies are coherently represented, implemented, monitored and reviewed at an appropriate national, regional, county and local level.

Some of the key achievements identified include: TO BE ADDED

3.4.1 Landscape Conservation and Enhancement

3.4.2 Enjoyment and Understanding

3.4.3 Developing the Surrey Hills Economy

3.4.4 Partnership and Coordination

3.5 Surrey Hills AONB Family

Although the fundamental purpose of the Management Plan will be to encourage co-ordinated action by all organisations, agencies and individuals, over the last five years 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. The driver has been the recognition that Government funding is heavily constrained, so working collaboratively through the family provides an opportunity to diversify and broaden the resource base, including access to skills, funding and volunteering.

The Surrey Hills Family includes the Surrey Hills AONB Board, serviced by the AONB Unit, working collaboratively with the following organisations:

- **Surrey Hills Enterprises:** This Community Interest Company's mission is to promote the Surrey Hills as a national asset for the benefit of local businesses in order to enhance our community and conserve our unique heritage. Controlled by a Board of Directors, including representatives of the AONB Board, it offers membership to commercial partners under a licence agreement with Surrey County Council on behalf of the Surrey Hills AONB Board.
- **Surrey Hills Society:** This charity is a membership organisation established as a charity to recruit and inform individuals with an interest in the Surrey Hills by running a range of walks, talks and projects that enhance the public's understanding and enjoyment of the Surrey Hills.
- **Surrey Hills Trust Fund:** This is a dedicated fund established under the umbrella of The Community Foundation for Surrey to attract donations from individuals and companies to ensure the continued success of the work of the AONB Unit. Where development proposals would cause harm to the AONB, in spite of any avoidance or mitigation measures, but the decision maker considers such development should be permitted in the public interest, this charitable fund provides the opportunity for those progressing them to make a voluntary contribution towards measures to enhance parts of the AONB to offset, to a degree, the harm caused. Any offer of contribution will not be taken into account in the determination of a planning application.

3.6 The Surrey Hills Brand

Although the Surrey Hills as a designated landscape and place name cannot be protected, the Surrey Hills AONB Board has developed an emblem for the Surrey Hills that has been protected by Surrey County Council as a trademark. What unites the Surrey Hills Family is that they all have a legal requirement to benefit the Surrey Hills and have use of the Surrey Hills trademark. They share the brand vision:

“Creating a legacy for the Surrey Hills”

The Brand Values are:

These brand values need to be reflected throughout all AONB activities in order to build understanding and to protect its reputation. The Surrey Hills brand needs to be used consistently by the Surrey Hills family. This is achieved through the Surrey Hills Marketing Group to provide a synergy across the Surrey Hills Family in developing and protecting the integrity of the Surrey Hills brand.

3.7 Strategic Objectives

With the continued constraints in public financing, the Delivery Strategy seeks to reduce the reliance on public funding. This will be achieved through growing the membership and activity of the Society; growing the business sector's involvement and revenue streams through Surrey Hills Enterprises; and generating income through the Surrey Hills Trust Fund in support of the implementation of the AONB Management Plan. A Surrey Hills Family Delivery Plan will detail how the strategic objectives set out in the AONB Management Plan will be delivered.

The proposed strategic objectives identified for the next five years are themed under the following outcomes:

3.7.1 Planning

- Influence planning policy and decisions by advising on the preparation of Local Plans and major developments affecting the AONB
- Raise awareness among the public and relevant bodies of the pressures on the Surrey Hills and the need for tight controls on development through, amongst other channels, regular reports in the Surrey Hills Newsletter
- Support Natural England in the process of the AONB Boundary Review to commence in 2019

3.7.2 Landscape Conservation and Enhancement

- Support the Defra family to test and trial new approaches to Environmental Land Management to ensure more, bigger and less fragmented areas for wildlife, with no net loss of priority habitat and an increase in the overall extent of priority habitats
- Support the development and extension of Farm Clusters across the Surrey Hills, including Greenscapes and the North Downs Facilitation Groups/
- Work with the Surrey Nature Partnership to enhance wildlife habitats with 90% of priority habitats in favourable or recovering condition and at least 50% of SSSIs in favourable condition, while maintaining at least 95% in favourable or recovering condition.
- Reduce the impact of overhead lines in the Surrey Hills by implementing 2 schemes per annum with SSE and UK Power Networks
- Develop best practice and support schemes that promote and reinforce the rural character of the Surrey Hills country lanes and villages

3.7.3 Access, Enjoyment and Understanding

- Develop and extend the Cycle and Equestrian Surrey Hills programmes
- Establish the Surrey Hills Access Fund, with the Surrey Hills Society and Community Foundation for Surrey, to secure investment into countryside access and support for volunteers.
- Inspire and engage new audiences through the Surrey Hills Arts programme, including delivering Surrey Unearthed, events, new work and creative health walks.
- Develop an Inspiring Views programme to open up and maintain up to 2 important views per annum to and from the Surrey Hills AONB
- Increase the membership, profile, events programmes and volunteering opportunities through the Surrey Hills Society with a target of 2000 members by 2024
- Support the governance arrangements for the North Downs Way National Trail and help to deliver the Pilgrimage and Great Walks of England programme.
- Deliver the Forgotten Landscapes HLF to raise awareness and understanding of medieval settlements and how they have shaped the contemporary landscape,
- Support annual Surrey Hills Challenge and Festival of Sport at Denbies as an opportunity to promote the Surrey Hills Trust Fund and shared use and enjoyment of the Surrey Hills
- Grow the Surrey Hills Wood Fair to over 5000 visitors per annum to promote awareness of woodland management issues and rural business

3.7.4 Growing the Surrey Hills Economy

- Support the development of Surrey Hills Enterprises CIC to grow its membership (target no of members and income/)
- Help secure the continuation of a Surrey Rural LEADER programme to benefit the economy of the Surrey Hills area
- Maximise the benefits of rural tourism in partnership with Visit Surrey, regional and national tourism bodies
- Develop relationship and investment opportunities through Local Enterprise Partnerships including Coast to Capital and Enterprise M3

3.7.5 Partnership and Coordination

- Ensure sound governance, reporting and monitoring of the AONB Management Plan through quarterly meetings of the Surrey Hills AONB Board with 90% attendance
- Develop the Surrey Hills Trust Fund with the Community Foundation for Surrey with a target of £100k through flow project funding per annum and £500k endowment by 2024
- Organise an annual Surrey Hills Partnership as an opportunity to oversee and scrutinise the work of the Surrey Hills family through an annual tour.
- Establish a revised constitution for the Surrey Hills AONB Board and secure funding support from Defra and local authority partners by 2024
- Review the AONB Management Plan and deliver a new Management Plan for adoption by 2024
- Develop policy and strategy with central and local government through active membership of the NAAONB attending Conference and AGM
- Establish a methodology and a baseline to monitor landscape change to help identify the types of change taking place and how these are affecting the landscape character and natural beauty of the Surrey Hills AONB by 2024

3.8 Monitoring implementation of the AONB Management Plan

The Surrey Hills AONB Board will take the lead in monitoring the implementation of the Plan. This will be achieved by establishing a monitoring mechanism for partners to report on the extent to which the Management Plan targets have been met. This will provide the basis for the assessment as to the effect they have in conserving and enhancing the AONB landscape and the enjoyment and understanding of it. The Surrey Hills Board will keep under review the Delivery Plan, publish quarterly e-bulletins on progress and publish an annual report