

Date: 4th September 2019
Report: Surrey Hills AONB Unit Activity Report
Written by: Surrey Hills AONB Unit

Purpose of Report

To update Members on the activities related to the Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan (2014 – 2019)

Summary

This report refers to activities of the Surrey Hills AONB Unit under the following Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan headings:

- Advocacy, Partnership and Coordination
- Planning
- Landscape Conservation and Access
- Enjoyment and Understanding

The report includes updates from the Working Groups

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the activities on the AONB Unit.

Background papers: Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan 2014 - 2019

Attached:

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1. ADVOCACY, PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION

1.1 Glover Review of Designated Landscapes. In July Defra published the Interim Findings of the Julian Glover review. In summary, they include:

- A new National Landscape Service could result in efficiency savings and a more effective model.
- The governance of National Park Authorities and AONBs needs to be reformed.
- AONBs need to be strengthened, with more funding, stronger purposes and a greater voice on development.
- Designated Landscapes need to lead on nature recovery and should be a priority for the new Environmental Land Management System.
- There should be a national response to climate change with the goal of net-zero by 2050.
- More needs to be done to encourage diversity of visitors to Designated Landscapes.
- There should be closer alignment with the NHS on providing better health and well-being outcomes for society.
- The lack of affordable housing and an ageing population are common issues in Designated Landscapes.
- Funding should be drawn from a wider range of sources.
- Views on potential new designations and branding could be reported later.

The full exchange of letters with the Secretary of State can be found at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/817608/landscapes-review-interim-findings-july2019.pdf

1.2 National Association for AONBs. Members of the AONB team attended the National Conference in Colchester in July. This included a declaration setting targets for nature recovery. (see:

https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/application/files/7815/6326/2583/The_Colchester_Declaration.pdf. Our Surrey Unearthed project was shortlisted for the Bowland Award which recognises outstanding contributions for AONBs in inspiring and connecting communities. The NAAONB has secured a major HLF Resilient Heritage grant to develop AONB teams to be more collaborative in sharing resources and best practice. Rob Fairbanks and Ali Clarke are representing the Surrey Hills AONB on the programme. They are involved respectively on working groups looking at technology, communications and the arts. As part of the programme, local consultancy, Simon Matthews Associates, is reviewing the business model of the NAAONBs. This should inform the Glover Review.

1.3 London National Park City and Restoring the Future. On Monday 22nd July the AONB Director attended the launch of the London National Park City with the Mayor of London at City Hall. The mission is to make London a greener, healthier and wilder place. The Designated Landscapes around London are currently working with Daniel Raven-Ellison, founder of the London National Park City, on a campaign to visualize what a 'greener, healthier and zero carbon' London City Region may look like in 25 years time, including the role of our Designated Landscapes. This should now launch in October and run until spring 2020.

1.4 AONB Management Plan. The Officers Working Group met on 22nd October to progress the adoption of the AONB Management Plan. Dr Jessica Salder, Principal Environmental Assessment Officer at SCC, has completed the HRA and Environment Report. The reports provide a great wealth of information that we can use to help start monitoring the AONB. Jessica recommends changes to just one policy, but we are awaiting formal observation from Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency. Copies of these documents are available on request. The plan is to get the

document adopted by the respective authorities by the end of October in time to publish for November. Please let me know if you have any comments.

1.5 Unearthing Landscapes Symposium. The Surrey Unearthed programme is finishing with an art and landscape symposium at the University for the Creative Arts, Farnham, on 10th October. This will be chaired by Joy Sleeman, author and lecturer on Land Art, and closed by Perdita Hunt, who will be stepping down as Chair of the Surrey Hills Arts Partnership to be replaced by Alistair Burtenshaw, the Director of the Watts Galley. AONB Board members are encouraged to attend. More info: <https://www.surreyunearthed.org/unearthing-landscapes-symposium/> You can email Ali if you would like a complimentary place.

1.6 Surrey University Symposium. The AONB Management Plan will be launched at the Symposium on 27th November. The theme will be the Natural Health Service. The Key Note speaker is Dr William Bird and it will profile some of the collaborative research with the University on Living Environments for Healthy Ageing and restoring young minds in the Surrey Hills. Bridget Biddell, the High Sheriff, will close the event with her theme of Nurture through Surrey's Nature. We are working with Surrey Hills Enterprises' members to provide an expo including food and drink, and outdoor activity providers.

1.7 Surrey Hills Affordable Housing Seminar. The English Rural Housing Association is organizing a seminar for Parish Councils and Local Authorities on 24th September at Denbies Wine Estate. Clive Smith will be speaking on the planning issues related to affordable housing in the AONB. Members are encouraged to attend.

1.8 Parish Council Forum. Plans are being discussed with the Surrey Association of Local Councils to have a forum on 5th November. This will be to update the parish councils on planning issues, the AONB Management Plan, highways and the Dark Skies initiative. Members are asked to note the date. Further information and venue to be confirmed.

2. PLANNING

2.1 Government Planning Guidance – Natural environment. The Government published this updated planning guidance on 21st July this year. It takes forward aspects of the Government's "25 Environment Plan" to contain most welcome measures for the Surrey Hills AONB. As Government planning guidance it forms a material planning consideration for the determination of planning applications and in local plan preparation. It generally raises the profile and importance of biodiversity and other environmental considerations. Officers understand the concept of "net gain" and other aspects of the guidance is intended to be enshrined within the forthcoming Environment Bill and therefore be a legal requirement.

Net gain in planning describes an approach to development that leaves the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. Net gain is an umbrella term for both biodiversity net gain and wider environmental net gain. (paragraph 020 of the guidance). Net gain will now be a matter for your Planning Adviser to consider in individual cases if relevant in his consultation responses. This together with other provisions in the document should ensure that mitigation measures to any harm arising from development in the Surrey Hills will be significant. If measures cannot be included on a development site then it would seem the applicant should provide off site environmental or biodiversity gains which may be difficult. Easier might be to make a financial contribution towards such gains elsewhere. This would be in addition to the Community

Infrastructure Levy (CIL) unless Council's CIL documents are updated to cover such provisions. In the AONB that might include contributing towards landscape improvements. Channeling the contributions through the Surrey Hills Trust Fund would seem to present advantages. Before now a Planning Authority in determining a planning application could take little or no account of a site being cleared of any of its biodiversity value, including trees and wildlife, shortly before submission of the application. Most trees are not subject to TPOs. The cleared site would then form the base for considering any biodiversity or environmental net gain and so it would take little for there to be a net gain. The guidance now contains the following:

“It may be relevant to consider whether any deliberate harm to this biodiversity value has taken place in the recent past, and if so whether there are grounds for this to be discounted in assessing the underlying value of the site (and so whether a proposal would achieve a genuine gain).”

The Officers Working Group will consider at its next meeting how best this Government's guidance can benefit the purpose of AONB designation to conserve and enhance landscape and scenic beauty.

Boundary Review. Still no change from the situation reported at the last meeting where Natural England was waiting for the Suffolk Coast and Heath's AONB Boundary Review to be approved and for the Glover Report to be published. The latter is due to be published later this month. Depending upon anything relevant in that report, at the next meeting a report will be brought as to whether a further new top level approach be made to Natural England to commence the Boundary Review.

2.2 Local Plan update. The result is imminent of CPRE's legal challenge to the Waverley Local Plan Part 1 about housing numbers now at the Court of Appeal.

Towards the end of last year Waverley Borough Council deferred the Officers' recommended revision of its Waverley Local Part 2 in order to carry out further consultations. That revised version of the Plan is more detailed than Local Plan Part 1. It is expected to be published shortly.

The 3 legal challenges to the adoption of the Guildford Local Plan need to take their course.

The Mole Valley Draft Local Plan is expected to be published for consultation in October. A report on it, together with a summary of the planning submission made on behalf of the Board, will come to the next meeting.

The Inspector's report has been received on the Reigate and Banstead Development Management Plan. Modifications to the Plan have been published.

An Inspector has been appointed to examine Tandridge's "Our Local Plan: 2033". Like the others, the Plan's approach to the AONB and AGLV is good.

2.3 Planning application overview. The number of responses your Planning Adviser has made to planning application consultations has been at a similar level to last year's high number of about 300.

3. LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION AND ACCESS

3.1 Environmental Land Management System. The Surrey Hills proposal has been incorporated into a national Farming for the Nation bid which has been submitted by the National Association for AONBs. The proposal is to research and co-design (with farmers) a strategic, landscape scale approach to targeting payments for natural capital (environment and amenity). This will include payments for farmers and landowners to input against standard rates. Defra want the projects to be completed within a year in order to inform the design of the Pilot that will start in 2021.

3.2 Farm Clusters – South West Surrey. The AONB unit supports two farm cluster groups through the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund. These are for the North Downs, between Guildford and Dorking, and Greenscapes, focusing on large woodland estates in the Godalming and Cranleigh areas. These provide the opportunity for landscape scale working and are central to delivering any Environmental Land Management Scheme. Recent activity has included training on pollinators and a joint training programme on tree disease. Bridget and Bill Biddell are hosting a meeting on 11th September for landowners and farmers in south west Surrey, around the Wealden Heath SPA, to consider submitting a bid to Natural England for a new cluster. This is being chaired by Angus Stovold. If successful, this would provide extensive coverage of the Surrey Hills AONB through clusters, which could be a key landscape scale delivery vehicle for the government's Environmental Land Management System.

3.3 Vineyards. The Vineyards of the Surrey Hills consortium was launched in June. For more information see: <https://www.surreyhillsvineyards.co.uk>. One of the Test and Trail proposals for ELMS is to research and design a scheme that would enhance the nature conservation assets of vineyards. This is a partnership with Wine UK, the Kent Downs and the South Downs.

3.4 Byways Working Group. The Group last met on 11th February 2019. Wolvens Lane continues to be a priority. The Group is grateful for the support of volunteer members of the Trail Riders Fellowship for putting up the new signs which explain user responsibilities on the Byways Open to All Traffic. Thanks also go to the Surrey Green Lanes Association (GLASS) for the financial support they have given the Forestry Commission towards the measures they propose to put in place to stop the ease in which vehicles can access their land illegally. The next meeting of the Group is scheduled for 16th September 2019. At that meeting there will be an update from Andy Adams, Surrey Police, on the Off Road Engagement day held in May to educate members of the public on responsible use of byways in the Surrey Hills. There will also be a presentation by Rob Hewer of the National Trust on the Mole Valley Against Fly Tipping Group.

3.5 Be Nice Say Hi campaign. Following the launch of the campaign with Jenny Seagrove, Cycling UK and BHS, we are working with volunteers on updating the way-marking with "Be Nice, Say Hi". Haslemere Station is also being developed as a gateway with Trusty The Cow being recommissioned and repainted by Louise Dunckley to be sited outside the station in September. There is a change of strategy in terms of not way-marking single track trails but trying to encourage cyclists to seek appropriate skills training and guiding to reduce the liability on landowners.

3.6 Box Hill to Leith Hill. A bid is being developed to Coast to Capital LEP for a multi-user trail that will link proposed cycle hubs at Denbies and the Surrey Hills Business Park, Wotton. The majority of the funding will go into surface improvements, including opening up a new stretch through the vineyard and improvements to Wolven's Lane. The bid will be submitted by 20th September.

3.7 Equestrian Working Group: The Group met last met on 3rd April 2019. To date eleven equestrian trails have been identified and ridden by members of the Group and are available to download from the equestrian section of the Surrey Hills website. Surrey Hills “Horse Ride” waymarkers have been produced. These will be installed on the trails, together with the “Be Nice, Say Hi” campaign stickers. This campaign encourages positive communication between various users of the bridleway network. Some work, identified by the Group, has been carried out on Leith Hill, including the repair of gates and bridges and removal of overhanging branches. The Group is next due to meet on 5th September 2019.

3.8 North Downs Way National Trail. A major project is the Great Trails of England in which the North Downs Way is being promoted alongside other Trails to overseas markets (see: <https://www.greatenglishtrails.com>.) We are also working on various access improvements, and have secured INTERREG funding that will support the Inspiring Views programme.

4. ENJOYMENT AND UNDERSTANDING

4.1 Website. A new crowd funding area of the website has been developed to raise funds for the next inspiring view. If successful this web tool can be used to raise public funds for other projects. Work is underway to further develop the website to make it more consumer focused. New ‘Stay’, ‘Food and Drink’ and ‘Be Inspired’ pages will be created to better integrate Surrey Hills Enterprises businesses and experiences into the website.

Our Google analytics continue to show an increase in visitors to the website. Since the last AONB Board meeting in June, 18,862 people have visited the website on average each month, compare this to 2018 when we averaged 16,500 per month.

4.2 Google banner. The Surrey Hills was identified as a National Park on Google Maps in 2016. The Surrey Hills has 11,394 reviews (averaging 4.7 out of 5 stars). The Cotswolds has 12,281 reviews (4.6 out of 5) and The Chilterns AONB 6,839 (4.5 out of 5). The Google banner offers an excellent way to drive traffic to the Surrey Hills website.

4.3 Social Media. Our social media channels continue to play a vital role in spreading the word about the work we do. The aim is to increase our social media following and video appears to be a popular way to do this. Board Members are encouraged to join the Surrey Hills Social Media channels by visiting the website and clicking on the social media icons.

Currently the Surrey Hills AONB has the following followers:

Twitter 4884 (an increase of 120); **Facebook** 4370 (an increase of 141); **Instagram** 1721 1644 (an increase of 77).

4.4 My Surrey Hills Campaign. Our *My Surrey Hills* series of videos are proving popular with over 35,000 views on Facebook alone since January. Each month a new video is released via our social media channels. Each video features people who live, work in or simply enjoy visiting the Surrey Hills. Since the last Board meeting in June we have profiled horse riders Maggie Scott and Jane Garrett and Thursley National Nature Reserve Manager, James Giles. The aim of the campaign is to show how important it is that the Surrey Hills are protected through our policies in the Management Plan into the future for people to benefit. A compilation of all the videos will be premiered at the Surrey Hills Symposium in November.

Please visit www.surreyhills.org/my-surrey-hills/ to view all the videos.

4.5 PR. Press releases have been written on the Heathland Artworks exhibition at Farnham Heath, launch of the Surrey Hills to South Downs Community Rail Partnership, the Inspiring Views crowdfunding campaign, 70 years of protected landscapes campaign and more. Surrey Life magazine profiled our My Surrey Hills videos in the June edition and 70th campaign in the August edition. We are also currently collaborating with Vantage Point magazine on a photography competition. All press releases are sent to the local media and relevant publications and can be viewed on the Surrey Hills website at www.surreyhills.org/news.

4.6 70 years of protected landscapes. 2019 marks 70 years since Government passed an Act of Parliament to establish National Parks and AONBs. A campaign to celebrate the protected landscapes of the South East was launched in mid-July. Led by the Surrey Hills AONB and South Downs National Park, the campaign has engaged the major transport providers in the South East (South Western, Southern, Great Western, South Eastern, Stagecoach South & East, Brighton & Hove, Metrobus and Gatwick airport) all of whom are supporting the campaign through their marketing collateral and digital media. The aim is to encourage awareness of protected landscapes and encourage use of sustainable transport amongst a younger demographic (17-35 year olds). The campaign also featured on digital screens across the North and South terminals of Gatwick airport during the beginning of August. Visit www.going-outout.co.uk for further details.

4.7 Girl Guiding Surrey. We are delighted with the interest and uptake on the ‘Into the Surrey Hills’ badge and resource pack created in partnership with the Surrey Hills Society. Stella Cantor of the Surrey Hills Society has worked extremely hard to sell the badge into the Surrey divisions of the Girl Guiding Association and to date over 700 worksheets and badges have been purchased. Badges sell at £1 per badge with funds going to the Surrey Hills Society. The aim of this work is to raise awareness of the Surrey Hills amongst a younger audience. A second push to further promote the badge will take place in September to encourage guiding groups to access the Surrey Hills.

4.8 Rail to Ramble 2019. This project, in partnership with the Haslemere Community Rail Partnership and the Surrey Hills Society, is now complete. A leaflet featuring two walking routes from Haslemere to Godalming station has been produced and is currently being distributed. 3000 copies were initially printed and South Western Railway have kindly agreed to print a further 5000 copies which they will distribute across their network.

4.9 ‘House of Invisible Hands’. Alongside Walter Bailey’s new permanent sculptural shelter at Farnham Heath, is a mass participation artwork. Walter has created a temporary installation with hundreds of kindling sticks where individuals have created faces using pyrography to represent the hidden workers on our landscape. Participants include those from Creative Response, Ochre Printable, Bloomin’ Arts and the Orpheus Centre. ‘KINDling’ will be at Farnham Heath until the end of September then go to the Creative Response Gallery where it will be shown as part of Farnham Craft Month.

4.10 Harvest 2019 – One Moon Harvest is a community celebration of our outstanding landscape at Box Hill on 28th September at 7pm. This year the theme is One Moon and artist Mary Branson will be creating a moon with people and giant lanterns in the field below. We are partnering with Surrey Arts, Mole Valley DC and the National Trust to deliver this event on 28th September. You can view the film of last year’s event here: <https://www.surreyunearthed.org/harvest-box-hill-event>

4.11 Heathland Artworks. This project allows BA and MA students from craft, design and fine art courses at the University for the Creative Arts to take part in a real project. It is on until 27th October incorporating Craft Month.

4.12 Inspiring Views. We have developed a new ‘Inspiring Views’ project commissioning artist Will Nash for the Albury Downs, on the North Downs Way National Trail near Newlands Corner. The project will include access improvements, open habitat restoration with Butterfly Conservation and an educational outreach programme. There is a crowd funding campaign to support the project at <https://www.inspiringviews.org>.

4.13 Surrey Hills Arts Mailing List. For updates, please sign up to the Surrey Hills Arts mailing list: www.surreyuneearthed.org/mailling-list.