**Item 8**

##### AONB

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

2 March 2022

**AONB Board response to the Surrey 2050 Place Ambition developed by the Surrey Future Partnership**

**Purpose of the report:**

To consider a response to Surrey’s 2050 Place Ambition, which has been developed by the Surrey Future Partnership.

**Recommendations:**

It is recommended that:

1. The Board responds to the consultation on Surrey’s 2050 Place Ambition as detailed in paragraph 3 and that the response is copied to the Board’s constituent Borough, District and County Councils.

**Introduction:**

1. The Place Ambition has been developed by the Surrey Future Partnership. It is intended to be implemented through various local and countywide plans and strategies including district and borough local plans, climate change and economic strategies, and the local transport plan. It is also intended to promote a long term, co-ordinated and cross boundary approach to planning and managing the impacts of growth. Therefore, its longer term significance for the Surrey Hills AONB could be substantial and affect the future of this nationally protected landscape.

**Response:**

1. The Board is surprised and concerned that the Version 2 draft for consultation does not recognise the importance of protecting and enhancing the Surrey Hills AONB in accordance with the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and the Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan 2020-2025 formally adopted by the County Council and constituent Surrey Hills AONB Borough and District Councils. The Surrey Hills AONB is one of the County’s greatest assets, including an economic asset.

Unbalanced approach. The Place Ambition is unbalanced in its approach to the County, giving excessive weight to growing the economy and development and too little recognition of the environmental harm that would result, especially in putting development and recreational pressures on the Surrey Hills AONB. The intentions that growth would be sustainably carried out is naive and would be unimplementable in practice in a congested County.

The document takes insufficient recognition of the national significance of AONBs in influencing a sustainable way forward. Contrary to the Government’s own national levelling up ambition. Since the document was published the Government has introduced its levelling up ambition to address regional inequality and to level up the country. The document is therefore out of date.

Encouraging growth in wealthy Surrey would work against the Government’s intention to direct growth to the mire deprived parts of the country. Market forces are such that employment and housing development does not need to be encouraged in Surrey. If they are, that would work against directing growth needed elsewhere in the national interest. The document needs to be fundamentally revised.

Contrary to South East regional priorities. London’s regeneration and growth in the Thames Gateway are still considered to be the regional priority. There seems to be little indication that Surrey is a regional priority for growth. The protection and enhancement of the Surrey Hills AONB should be complementary to London’s growth as it is so accessible and brings substantial health and well being benefits.

What does the document mean by “growth”? Is growth population, dwellings, more jobs, more employment development or what? The document is unclear. Surrey is already regarded as becoming congested and the pressures on the Surrey Hills AONB are becoming difficult to manage.

This document seems to be a “developers charter”. What account has been taken of greater working from home reducing the need for existing office space, let alone any increase? The document should be recognising and supporting the conversion of offices to small and more affordable dwellings.

Surrey does not need to encourage growth as the market forces are there. Residents and businesses are already attracted to Surrey because of its proximity to London, Heathrow, Gatwick, skilled workforce, attractive environment and the significant contribution the Surrey Hills AONB makes to residents’ quality of life. The document should therefore concentrate upon managing market growth.

Strategic Priority 3 - Strategic Opportunity Areas shown to be within the Surrey Hills AONB. The Strategic Opportunity Areas proposed within the following parts of the Surrey Hills AONB are directly contrary to national and local planning policies, and it suggested, the wishes of Surrey people: • West of Farnham • South west and south east of Guildford • South of Leatherhead • North of Reigate and Redhill.

The growth shown within the AONB map (attached as an appendix) is highly dangerous and must be amended to avoid it being used by developers. Development within those lovely parts of the AONB surely cannot be regarded as the “good growth” ambitions within the document.

Strategic Priority 4 - invest in natural capital and deliver nature recovery.

The document misses the opportunity of referring to the expansion of the Surrey Hills AONB as one of the solutions. No recognition exists of the work of the Surrey Hills AONB Board in promoting natural capital and nature recovery. No reference is made to biodiversity net gain.

Where the document refers to new development contributing positively (page 12 para 3.2) it should go on to state that a significant proportion of the uplift in land values arising from development permissions should be directed towards the AONB to deal with recreation, access, nature recovery, carbon offsetting, offsite biodiversity net gain, greenways, tourism etc.

The document needs to recognise that development is dependent upon an enlarged, protected and enhanced AONB. The 3 Strategic Priorities concentrate solely on economic growth. The need to protect and enhance the County’s environment, national landscape, biodiversity, nature, action against climate change, do not feature in any of the Strategic Priorities possibly because they have been omitted from the document’s preceding shared Principles and Values in paragraph 3.2.

The protection and enhancement of the Surrey Hills AONB is one of the County’s greatest assets and brings health and quality of life to residents and visitors.

**Next steps:**

The above response to the consultation on Surrey’s 2050 Place Ambition to be submitted to the Surrey Future Partnership and be copied to the Board’s constituent, Borough, District and County Councils.

**Report contact:** Clive Smith, Surrey Hills Planning Adviser

**Contact details:** **clive.smith@surreycc.gov.uk**

