**Item 9**

##### AONB

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

2 March 2022

**Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan Monitoring Report**

**Purpose of the report:**

To update Members on the activities related to the implementation of the Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan (2020 – 2025).

**Recommendations:**

It is recommended that:

1. Members note the activities of the Surrey Hills Family and partners in delivering the AONB Management Plan (2020 – 2025).

**Introduction:**

1. Although the fundamental purpose of the Management Plan will be to encourage co-ordinated action by all organisations, agencies and individuals, 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’s Vision:

***The Surrey Hills is recognised as a national asset in which its natural and cultural assets 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 for their health and well-being.***

1. This report provides an overview on progress under the following Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan pillars:

* Planning
* Landscape Conservation and Enhancement
* Access, Enjoyment and Understanding
* Growing the Surrey Hills Economy
* Advocacy. Partnership and Coordination

1. The Surrey Hills Family framework (Appendix 1) is work in progress to monitor the delivery. This will be reported to the AONB Board and reviewed by Surrey Hills Chairs’ Group.

**Planning**

1. **Surrey Hills Expansion Project.** The platform was opened in December and over 2000 pieces of evidence were submitted by 31 January. This evidence is being appraised by the Natural England consultants. The [Story Map](https://southcoastgis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=1ab2260b98c944409cfa8732802ff6a6) will also be updated regularly with information gathered from survey participants,
2. **Wanborough Fields**. Concern continues regarding the sale of land at Wanborough Fields with the incremental development of fragmented parcels of land. Our Chair will be raising this matter with six Surrey MPs who have arranged a photo call at Wanborough on 11 March to show their support for expanding the Surrey Hills boundary.
3. **Biodiversity Net Gain**. The Surrey Hills Officers Working Group is coordinating a response to the Defra consultation on regulations and implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain. As a Protected Landscape, the Surrey Hills could benefit from off-site investment that could deliver a net gain contribution in the AONB and allow a developer and local authority to maximise the development value of a site.
4. **Rural Traffic Management.** Surrey County Council is taking a strategic approach to area wide speed management across the Surrey Hills. Speed limits of 20, 30 and 40 mph are being proposed in the area between Dorking, Guildford and Cranleigh. These will be considered by the respective Local Committees in March with a view to implementing them in the new financial year. Implicit in the measures is to promote and reinforce the character of the rural area including Surrey Hills village gateways and the potential for repeater signs to be mounted on oak posts. This offers a potentially tremendous benefit to the Surrey Hills, which could be expanded across the west of the area in future years.

**Landscape Conservation and Enhancement**

1. **Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) – Surrey Hills Fund**. The Surrey Hills allocation is £280k in 21/22; and circa £370k in both 22/23 and 23/24. Projects over £5k are taken to the Local Advisory Panel which is chaired by Hugh Broom (NFU) and the vice chair is Bridget Biddell (CLA). In the financial year 21/22 to date 27 projects have been funded, including creating over 7.5km of new hedgerow and the provision of living spaces for wildlife on over 20 different land holdings. There have also been grants for equipment, including no till drill, specialist mowers for conservation work and a trailer to assist with educational visits to a farm. As the fund is expected to become more competitive, the Local Advisory Panel will be organising an away day in March to set priorities.
2. **Defra Team Visit**. Before Christmas the Surrey Hills hosted a visit by the Defra FiPL team that included visits to Shackleford, Albury and Wotton to introduce them to the Surrey Hills, some of our projects and key partners, including Hugh Broom, as chair of the Panel. The team were even back in February for a volunteer hedgerow planting day and were joined by Sion McGeever, the Deputy Director, who sponsors National Parks and AONBs

1. **Landscape scale land management.** The Surrey Hills contracts facilitators for 3 cluster schemes funded under the Defra Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Scheme, which are the North Downs, Greenscapes, and West Surrey Greensands. The Defra funding will be ending over 2022 and a priority is to extend projects with FiPL funding, as the facilitators are instrumental in promoting, advising and developing collaborative bids for the Surrey Hills Fund. Natural England is also support Big Chalk, which is a regional project led by the Protected Landscapes to restore downland landscapes and habitat, and NE is creating a wider landscape vision around the Thursley National Nature Reserve, incorporating the Wealden Heath SPA.
2. **Conservation Volunteers**. The Surrey Hills Society Volunteer and Projects Coordinator, Christa Emmett, has been working tirelessly coordinating tree and hedgerow planting with community groups and schools. This includes coordinating the Surrey Choices Growth Team as supervised Conservation Volunteers, restoring grassland at Newlands Corner and the Albury Downs, which was profiled to the Minister, Lord Benyon. The Conservation Volunteer programme is also trying to support landowners in managing the unauthorised mountain bike trail network across the Surrey Hills.
3. **Surrey Hills Corporate Champions.** In a joint venture between Surrey Hills Enterprises and the Society, the first hedgerow trees were planted by the first Corporate Champions, Allianz, planting 1000 trees at Knowle Park in Cranleigh on 24 February.
4. **Surrey Hills Nature Recovery Strategy - Making Space for Nature.** Paintings of the 30 Surrey Hills indicator species have been created by an ‘Our Time’ artist at HMP Send, taking part in a programme delivered by the Watts Gallery Trust and funded by the Michael Varah Memorial Fund and the Surrey Hills Trust Fund. Plans are being made with the National Trust to exhibit the painting at Leith Hill Place, aligning with the celebration of Vaughn Williams’ 150th anniversary, which will be an opportunity to have a fundraising event and to thank all the partners, land managers and conservation bodies involved in developing the project.

**Access, Enjoyment and Understanding**

1. **Surrey Hills Website.** Surrey Creative has been commissioned, following a competitive procurement process, to develop the new website. This will enable easier content management, a better visitor offering and community hub element, as well as supporting major projects like the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme. The current website is getting circa 30,000 visits and 100,000 web page views per month. The new website will be a major opportunity to refresh the brand and to demonstrate greater diversity and inclusivity as a National Landscape. We are planning a professional photoshoot in a number of locations across the Surrey Hills which will be used for a variety of purposes to include images on the Surrey Hills website, social media and in printed materials.
2. **Welcome Surrey Hills – connecting people with nature.** This is a partnership project principally funded by Natural England to co-design, deliver and assess the impact of different nature-based interventions on the health and well-being for vulnerable and displaced young people. Surrey Outdoor Learning and Development will be the main delivery partner working with charities and children’s services, with Surrey University evaluating the impact.

1. **Platinum Jubilee Active Travel Promotion – The Mole Gap Trail**. As part of the development of the new Surrey Hills website and in partnership with the Community Rail Partnerships, we are coordinating the promotion of the Surrey Hills by rail and bus. As part of the promotion, the Mole Gap Trail, a walk linking Leatherhead and Dorking stations, is being revamped with funding from the Mole Valley DC Welcome Back Fund. This will include an innovative ArcGIS storyboard that will embed photos, video and real time links to timetables.
2. **Equestrian Working Group – Horseman’s Sunday.** A group of equestrians are keen to continue the working group to promote equestrian interests in the Surrey Hills, including public awareness and the development of a network of promoted trails. The Horseman’s Sunday event is being planned again for 24 April at St Martha’s Church with the reverend David Oakden. This is a lovely event for the Surrey Hills and we are keen to encourage more of the public to enjoy the spectacle.
3. **Habitat.** Artists and ecologists have come together to develop a creative eco space on campus at the University of Surrey. This pilot project is funded by Arts Council England and will involve the creation of sculptural habitats to support specific declining species. As well as the artists researching the species and developing creative structures, they will be engaging students, local school pupils and target groups in making their own habitats with valuable input from Surrey Wildlife Trust.
4. **Our Stories are Woven**: Individually crafted, beautifully embroidered responses to Bourne Wood have been made by women from the Mubarak Mosque in Tilford. They have enjoyed regular walks guided by artist Rachel Holmes, noticing particular natural elements which they have embroidered. These are being made into a hanging and will be exhibited as part of Farnham Craft Month later in the year. This project is funded by TECHNE through the Arts and Humanities Research Council.
5. **Orchard Portraits**: Renowned choreographer, Rosemary Lee, has been delivering expressive movement sessions with children and older people as part of her residency in Surrey. Rosemary is creating a video installation with film-maker Roswitha Chesher, inspired by and filmed in the beautiful old orchard at West Horsley Place. The installation Orchard Portraits will be exhibited in West Horsley Place in late summer and is funded by the Arts Council.
6. **Framed in Surrey**. Surrey Hills Arts held a screening of films inspired by place at Zero Carbon Guildford. We supported two of these films ‘And in the Soil, ‘There be Mirrors’ filmed at Waverley Abbey and ‘The Moth Effect’ by Amanda Loomes. This event also provided a great networking opportunity for local artists.
7. **Social Media.** The Surrey Hills family continue to use their individual social media channels to share information about all aspects of their work. We encourage you to engage with us on social media.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Family Member** | **Facebook** | **Twitter** | **Instagram** |
| Surrey Hills AONB | 8,109 | 6,343 | 4,069 |
| Surrey Hills Enterprises | 1,306 | N/a | 3,447 |
| Surrey Hills Society | 483 | 679 | 1,570 |
| Surrey Hills Arts | N/a | N/a | 3,152 |

**Growing the Surrey Hills Economy**

1. **A Guide to Surrey Hills.** A new guide to showcase the Surrey Hills and the range of events, activities, local produce, experiences and services within the Surrey Hills was published and distributed in December. It features all Surrey Hills Members Enterprises with sponsorship from Squires Garden Centres.
2. **Promoting Corporate offerings.** As part of Surrey Hills Enterprises’ strategy to raise awareness of Surrey Hills Members, to promote the rural economy and sustainable tourism, we have collated a portfolio of activities that we will be sending to corporate event buyers. From March onward, Surrey Hills Enterprises will be sending out a monthly email to event organisers, HR departments, hotels etc. to highlight one corporate experience and one venue in the Surrey Hills.
3. **Members Services.** Surrey Hills Enterprises’ membership continues to receive steady growth, with a development group looking at the corporate, tourism and hospitality sector which will feature large in the new website. Services to members includes an active WhatsApp Group and seminars on various topics.
4. **Norbury Park sawmill.** The Surrey Hills AONB Board responded to the Surrey County Council consultation on Norbury Park in general noting our support of the proposals, but that our priority was to ensure the continuation of a sawmill operation to support woodland management, and the retention and development of skills in the sector. There is an opportunity for a community interest company, perhaps working closely with our Surrey Hills Enterprises, to process local timber and to supply high value local markets in the area, including posts and signs for Surrey Hills highways.

**Advocacy. Partnership and Coordination**

1. **Landscape Review**. On 15 January, the Defra Secretary of State announced a 12 week consultation on the Government’s response to Julian Glover’s independent Landscapes Review, which looked at whether the protections for National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are still fit for purpose. See the announcement [here](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ambitious-proposals-to-strengthen-our-protected-landscapes-announced).
2. **Ministerial Visit.** On Tuesday 1 February our Minister, the Rt Hon Lord Benyon visited the Surrey Hills. This was an opportunity for the Minister to gain an insight into the boundary extension project, our land management work and to meet the Surrey Hills Family.
3. **Surrey Hills Community Forum**. A date is being planned for the annual Community Forum with the Surrey Association of Local Councils (SALC), led by Liz Cutter. Members’ advice would be welcome on whether this should be in person, online or hybrid, and the theme. There is a demand from some parish councils to resume the Working Group on highways and quiet lanes.
4. **Surrey Hills Symposium with Surrey University**. Over 400 people engaged in the Surrey Hills Symposium last November on the theme of climate and biodiversity emergency. This year’s Symposium is being planned for 30 November with the theme `Diversity and Inclusion in the countryside`. Based on the feedback from last year, the demand is to retain a hybrid event, to focus on the Surrey Hills and our projects and to have a longer session to allow networking and a marketplace.
5. **Surrey Hills Staffing.** Denise Furlonger and Pennie King both left the Surrey Hills team in December after many years’ service. Defra’s confirmation of a three year funding settlement expected in March 2022 will provide an opportunity to review the core staff requirement for the Surrey Hills.

**Conclusions:**

1. By working in collaboration, the Surrey Hills AONB family manages to deliver across a broad agenda in pursuit of the agreed vision for the Surrey Hills.

**Financial and value for money implications**

1. The Surrey Hills AONB team delivers the above programme of work with its core budget. Collaborating through the Surrey Hills family and partners demonstrates a high level of success in securing additional resources.

**Equalities and Diversity Implications**

1. The diversity of the Surrey Hills activity provides a wide range of opportunities to engage residents, businesses, and wider communities to understand, access and enjoy the Surrey Hills.

**Risk Management Implications**

1. The key risks are identified in the Risk Register that is reported annually to the AONB Board’s AGM, based on reputational, performance, finance, and governance risks. This will inform the delivery of the programme to mitigate risks as appropriate.

**Next steps:**

Members advice will help to inform the delivery of the AONB Management Plan.

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**Sources/background papers:**

* The Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan (2020 – 2025) https://www.surreyhills.org/board/our-management-plan/