**Item 9**

##### AONB

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

7 December 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 sustainable 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.** Natural England will be reporting progress under item 6.
2. **Planning casework.** The Planning Adviser continues to advise on a high number of development proposals, and inputting in the Waverley and Mole Valley Local Plan Hearings. The Planning inspector overturned Guildford Borough Council's refusal for the redevelopment of the Urnfield sports ground. Plans for the site were refused by Guildford Borough Council in December 2021 because of concerns over its location in the Surrey Hills
3. **A3 Guildford Major Study.** National Highways is looking at the feasibility of major schemes to relieve congestion in the Guildford area. The AONB Director is on the Project Board to advise on the environmental outcomes that any scheme may deliver. There are plans for an informal consultation in 2023.

**Landscape Conservation and Enhancement**

1. **Environmental Land Management Adviser.** We are delighted that Jenna Emmerton started as the new Environmental Land Management Adviser post in October. This is a fixed term 2 year contract to support the delivery of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and the development of the Surrey’s Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) the Surrey Hills.
2. **Cluster Groups.** The team is considering the opportunity to develop a bid to create a new Cluster group in East Surrey (Dorking to Oxted) with funding from Defra to support the Facilitation. There are three existing Cluster Groups that the Surrey Hills unit is keen to support now that external funding has come to an end, which are the North Downs (Guildford to Dorking), Greenscapes (Godalming, Cranleigh, Haslemere), and the West Surrey Greensands (Farnham, Guildford, Haslemere). These may have the opportunity to secure further funding. Cluster Groups are the foundation of our work on landscape scale environmental land management including delivering Farming in Protected Landscapes projects.
3. **Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) – Surrey Hills Fund**. The budget for 2022/23 is £279,000. The Panel agreed priorities are:
4. Collaboration – projects which bring together a range of partners, or work across a wider landscape with multiple landowners/managers e.g. farm clusters and partnerships with Network Rail and the Tree Council
5. Innovation – projects which offer new ideas or solutions
6. Projects which kick start or provide ‘seed corn’ ideas i.e. which begin something which will continue to deliver beyond the life of FiPL
7. Projects which facilitate wider benefits and bring additionality
8. **Heathland Connections – Nature Recovery Project.** Congratulations to Victoria Hawkins who has just been appointed by Natural England as the project manager. We hope to work closely with Victoria as part of the Surrey Hills team, the Cluster Group and developing environmental land management project and engagement activities through the promoted routes and engagement through Surrey Hills Arts Heathland Artworks programme.
9. **Big Chalk.** Natural England is also supporting Big Chalk, which is a regional project led by the Protected Landscapes to restore downland landscapes and habitats, linking into the wider landscapes.
10. **Conservation Volunteers**. The Surrey Hills Society’s Volunteer and Projects Coordinator, Christa Emmett, has been helping to coordinate a wide variety of corporate, community group and developing volunteers under a Conservation Volunteer programme. There will be a community tree and hedgerow planting at Shackleford on 3rd December. Christa is coordinating work with various groups including Surrey Choices and National Highways. There has been a lot of engagement work including like National Autistic Society, SMEF, refugees and the Amber Foundation. Christa is also supporting Ashley Greening in her internship with Surrey Wildlife Trust. Ashley starred at the recent Surrey Hills Symposium.
11. **Surrey Choices Growth Team**. Massive congratulations to our wonderful team who recently won the BBC Environmental Award for supporting volunteers with autism and learning disabilities, in helping to conserve and enhance pathways, woodlands and other habitats in the Surrey Hills.
12. **Habitat.** Working with colleagues in SCC’s Place Making team, an Expression of Interest is being submitted to Arts Council England to roll out the pilot project delivered on campus at the University of Surrey. If they invite us to apply for the Place Partnerships fund, there will be 8 weeks to submit the full bid that we seek to fund a programme that greens urban areas in Surrey working with those local communities and installing sculptural habitats that support wildlife.

**Access, Enjoyment and Understanding**

1. **Countryside Code.** October saw the launch of the Countryside Code campaign in collaboration with Surrey County Council’s Countryside Visitor Services team. It aims to make the code more accessible for the public to follow, sharing positive messaging to educate the public on the particular challenges we face in the Surrey countryside. This campaign includes six 30 second videos from various community groups; farmers, walkers, cyclists, horse riders, fire & rescue and access managers.
2. **Surrey Hills Website.** The new website is a major opportunity to refresh the brand and to demonstrate greater diversity and inclusivity as a National Landscape, to promote sustainable travel and to profile our Surrey Hills Enterprises businesses. It will be live in December and launched in the New Year.
3. **Inspiring Views**. ‘Coccolith’, the ninth Inspiring Views artwork, was launched on 2nd November on the North Downs Way National Trail at the Titsey Estate, Tatsfield. The piece is by artist duo Trish Evans and Nick Humphries of INSTAR and has been built using traditional dry-stone wall techniques, by specialist Jason Hoffman, using a hand-picked selection of local ironstone rock excavated from the Titsey Estate along with ‘clunch’ chalk. The top of this simple circular structure is planted with native wildflowers that over the years will naturally flourish, attracting and nourishing wildlife and visitors alike.
4. **Harvest**. This year’s Harvest event welcomed over 400 people to the top of Box Hill to celebrate the outstanding Surrey Hills landscape through the arts. The event is a partnership between Surrey Hills Arts, the National Trust and Mole Valley District council, focusing on connecting us with each other and nature. The day included a walk by Active Inclusion, a Muslim hiking group, undertaking the 10 mile Box Hill hike, including prayers at High Ashurst. It included poetry, singing from over 8 community choirs and Ukrainian band Atmasfera ending with a torchlight procession back down the Zig Zag after Harvest.
5. **Our Stories are Woven**. Each year Surrey Hills Arts hosts a phd student as part of the TECHNE scheme. This year student Rachel Holmes delivered a project where she led groups on regular walks and then worked with them to create embroideries from the natural elements they particularly noticed. She worked with women from the Mubarak mosque in Tilford exploring Bourne Woods. Their completed hanging is currently on exhibition at Farnham Museum. Rachel repeated this activity with adults with learning disabilities at the Grange Centre exploring the beautiful surroundings in Bookham
6. **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.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Family Member** | **Facebook** | **Twitter** | **Instagram** | **Mailchimp**  **(Friends)** |
| Surrey Hills AONB | 9.021 | 6,559 | 4,527 | 8,711 |
| Surrey Hills Enterprises | 1,785 | 104 | 3,987 |
| Surrey Hills Society | 600 | 780 | 1,716 |
| Surrey Hills Arts | N/a | N/a | 3,543 |

**Growing the Surrey Hills Economy**

1. **Membership.** The Surrey Hills Enterprise’s membership continues to receive steady growth and in October reached a landmark 200 members. There is a development group looking at the corporate, tourism and hospitality sector which will feature large in the new website. We also welcomed Patrick Haveron who started as the Events Manager in October. Patrick will be supporting and extending the artisan markets. Michael Coughlan, SCC Executive Director Partnerships, Growth and Prosperity, has joined as a Director.
2. **Surrey Hills Wood Fair.** Enterprises organised this year’s successful Wood Fair on Saturday 10th and Sunday 11th September. This is a major event in the Surrey Hills calendar attracting around 6,000 visitors to promote, educate and inform all that is good about wood. The Making Space for Nature zone held talks, demonstrations and activities, including information for farmers, land managers and parish councils on FiPL. A major new Spring Fair is being planned with the Rural Life Museum at Tilford for 2023.

**Advocacy. Partnership and Coordination**

1. **Surrey Hills Partnership.** Many thanks to the Members who joined the 35 partners who attended the annual Partnership Tour on 28th October. The morning was hosted by the Trustees of the Titsey Estate and Bill Peters at Pitchfont Farm. As well as the farm tour, we had a discussion on Care Farming and Green Prescribing with guest speakers Dr Gillian Orrow and Robin Hobson. At lunch we were hosted at The Botley Hill with Stephen Rudd updating partners on the Boundary Review and Katherine Atkinson introducing herself as the proposed new Independent Chair. In the afternoon there was a visit to the Titsey Brewery and the new Inspiring View installation on the North Downs Way National Trail, taking in the extensive views south over the Greensand Hills and the Weald.
2. **Surrey Hills Symposium**. Thank you to the Members who attended the Symposium at Surrey University on Wednesday 23rd November. The theme was diversity and inclusion in the countryside. The marketplace that brought together some of our Surrey Hills Enterprises businesses, access and community groups. The Symposium was hosted by Professor Max Lu, the Vice-Chancellor, and Heather Kerswell provided the introduction. This was followed by 4 speakers and a Debate on how can we all protect, respect and enjoy our National Landscape, before Gordon Jackson summed up the evening’s event. A pre-event was an opportunity to help launch the University’s two Innovation Exploratorium spaces and to showcase the Surrey Hills Arts Habitat project.
3. **Annual Report**. The Annual Report for 2022 will be issued as a Friends newsletter. It will feature a Second a Day film which records the activities of the Surrey Hills team over the year.
4. **National Landscapes.** Defra is keen for AONBs to adopt the new National Landscapes branding as proposed by the Glover Review. They are funding the National Association to commission an agency, Nice and Serious, to develop the National Landscapes brand proposition. The Surrey Hills team is on the steering group.
5. **National Association for AONBs.** The Surrey Hills Director, Communication Lead and Projects and Volunteer Coordinator attended the Association’s Landscapes for Life Conference, *The Nation's Landscapes? Peoples and Places*, at Lancaster University in September. Plans are being made for the Surrey Hills to host the first National Landscapes conference in 2023.

**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.

**-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------**

**Report contact:** **Rob Fairbanks, Surrey Hills AONB Director**

**Contact details: 07772 365036**

**Rob.fairbanks@surreyhills.org**

**Sources/background papers:**

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