

News release

Natural England seeks your views on extending the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

- **Natural England is consulting on whether to designate additional areas as part of the Surrey Hills AONB**
- **The statutory and public consultation period will launch on the 7 March and will remain open until 13 June 2023.**
- **The proposals are to increase the size of the AONB by 25%, over 100 square kilometers.**

Natural England has today (Tuesday 7 March) launched a statutory and public consultation for proposed Surrey Hills AONB extensions. It will remain open for 14 weeks. This will be the formal consultation phase, where local authorities and other interested groups and individuals can comment on the proposed extensions and the evidence which supports them.

The proposal to extend the Surrey Hills AONB is part of an ambitious programme of landscape designation and is one of four new designation projects to help deliver on the Government's commitment to safeguard more of England's beautiful and iconic landscapes for future generations.

Allison Potts, Natural England Area Manager, said:

"This launch of the statutory and public consultation marks an exciting step forward in Natural England's ambitious landscape designation programme.

"The local community have already played a fantastic part responding to our earlier call for evidence to support extensions to the AONB and we are now looking forward to hearing what people think of the formal proposals.

We're inviting anyone interested in this fantastic landscape to take the time to examine the proposals and have their say on the consultation hub."

If the proposed areas are added to the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, this could bring many benefits including conserving and enhancing the natural and cultural heritage, as well as the views and beauty of the area. It will give improved access to nature for the benefit of people's health and wellbeing whilst boosting economic growth and local tourism and safeguard a nationally important landscape for future generations. All on the doorstep of London.

The Surrey Hills is an iconic and beautiful landscape encompassing rare habitats from acid and chalk grassland to extensive ancient woodland and is enjoyed by millions of residents and visitors. The AONB stretches across a quarter of the county of Surrey and includes the chalk slopes of the North Downs from Farnham in the west to Oxted in the east, and extends south to the deeply wooded Greensand Hills which rise around Haslemere.

Stakeholders and members of the public can visit consult.defra.gov.uk/ne-landscape-heritage-and-geodiversity-team/surrey-hills-boundary-variation to find out how to participate in the consultation.

Once the consultation period has closed, Natural England will assess the feedback, make any amendments, and the Natural England board will consider whether to approve a draft designation Order to include any new land within the AONB.

If a decision is made to proceed with designation, there will then be a further opportunity for everyone to comment on any proposed designation during a statutory Notice Period. Once the Notice Period is complete and responses have been analysed and proposals finalised, a signed Designation Order would be passed to the Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs for confirmation. Any Order would not however come into effect unless or until the Secretary of State confirms the designation. The Secretary of State may call a public inquiry at this stage to consider any objections if they consider it necessary.

Notes to Editors:

- The Written Ministerial Statement of 24th June 2021, by George Eustice Secretary of State (Defra) announced a boundary review of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- Natural England is the government's statutory advisor on landscapes in England, with duties and powers that include conserving and enhancing landscapes through the designation of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- The decision on whether to extend the Surrey Hills AONB will be made by Natural England's Board, having considered the required assessments and the results of the statutory and public consultation, which follows the earlier '*call for evidence*' from 2021.
- If a legal designation variation Order to include additional areas in the Surrey Hills AONB is approved by the Board, it would not take effect until it is confirmed by the Secretary of State (Defra). Prior to making this decision, the Secretary of State has the power to call a Public Inquiry.
- [Visit consult.defra.gov.uk/ne-landscape-heritage-and-geodiversity-team/surrey-hills-boundary-variation to find out how to participate in the consultation.](https://consult.defra.gov.uk/ne-landscape-heritage-and-geodiversity-team/surrey-hills-boundary-variation)
- More detail about the Surrey Hills AONB can be found here: surreyhills.org.

- Further details about the protected landscapes programme can be found by visiting: gov.uk/guidance/areas-of-outstanding-natural-beauty-aonbs-designation-and-management.
- This area of proposed landscape designation has been selected through an evidence-based shortlisting of proposals that have been made to Natural England over the last 20 years.
- This project is one of four areas that Secretary of State (Defra), George Eustice, announced in June 2021 that Natural England would be considering for designation, the others are:
 - **An extension to the Chilterns AONB** – to consider many special features including chalk streams, magnificent beechwoods, native woodland and wildflower-rich hills, bringing nature closer to populations in North London.
 - **Cheshire Sandstone Ridge AONB** – a diverse, distinctive, and celebrated landscape located in the heart of Cheshire, in close proximity to the large populations of NW England, rich in heritage, archaeology, wildlife, and culture.
 - **Yorkshire Wolds AONB** – a tranquil landscape of rolling hills, valleys and open plateaux interspersed with ancient woodland, chalk streams, farm holdings and historic villages, extending north from the River Humber.

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