

SURREY HILLS AONB BOUNDARY REVIEW

Report on Progress to the AONB Board – 6 December 2023

Purpose of the report

This is to provide the AONB Board with a report on progress, since the last AONB Board meeting that was held in June 2023. It will outline the next steps with Natural England's project to review the boundary of the Surrey Hills AONB. The report also provides details on the formal statutory and public consultation.

To remind the Board, Section 82(1) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 states:

“Where it appears to Natural England that an area which is in England but not in a National Park is of such outstanding natural beauty that it is desirable that the provisions of this Part relating to areas designated under this section should apply to it, Natural England may, for the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area, by order designate the area for the purposes of this Part as an area of outstanding natural beauty”.

Progress since June 2023

- At the time of the previous AONB Board meeting Natural England had brought to a close the formal statutory and public consultation (beginning March 7th, ending 13th June 2023). This stage of the project invited public, local authority and other organisations to comment on the 18 proposed extension areas along with several minor proposed boundary alterations (boundary anomalies), listed below:
 - Wey Valley, Farnham
 - Hogs Back
 - Wey Valley, Farley Hill
 - Binscombe Hills
 - Enton Hills
 - Cranleigh Waters
 - Hatchlands and East Clandon
 - Headley Hills
 - Chipstead
 - Happy Valley
 - Caterham Woods
 - Woldingham Valleys
 - Limpsfield
 - Godstone Hills
 - Bletchworth and Mole Valley
 - Ockley Low Weald
 - Dunsfold Low Weald
 - Dockenfield Hills

- The consultation was successful and received a high number of responses (approximately 1500). The Surrey Hills boundary review page on the Defra [consultation platform](#) is still live, with all documents and information on next steps.
- A thorough review and on-site analysis is now underway. Due to the higher number of responses than expected, and detailed arguments put forward for and against the designation of certain areas, there is a **small delay to the consultation analysis and response**. Currently, the aim is to publish the consultation analysis report early in the new year.
- The purpose of this key stage of the project is to collate, assess and evaluate issues and views on the designation options expressed during the formal consultation period and use them to inform and influence the development of the proposals for designation. Two types of data analysis is required, simple quantitative analysis of closed questions from the questionnaire and qualitative analysis of the open evidential questions.

Quantitative analysis: A simple quantitative analysis of overarching numbers will be used to differentiate, a) overall numbers responding, b) those for and against, c) breakdowns of the diversity data, d) breakdowns of responses from statutory respondents and non-statutory Local Authorities e) types of public respondent, such as those resident in the area/s proposed for designation, those in the existing AONB, those in neighbouring areas and those from outside the area. This information will form part of the evidence base provided to support the project and will be used in public feedback on the consultation process.

Qualitative analysis will be required to assess the types of reasons and evidence provided in the open questions. For this exercise we will use a series of codes to allow easy segregation of which question they relate to, and the types of subjects raised. Each response will then be coded so that our database can be sorted by reason type and type of respondent.

Next steps

- **Reporting Consultation Responses** - the consultation report will contain both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The quantitative analysis will give the overall figures for each feature analysed. The qualitative analysis will correspond to the themes relating to natural beauty, desirability and boundaries. The report will include a summary of the detailed comments made by both statutory and non-statutory respondents. Natural England's response to that evidence will also be provided.
- **It should be noted that if the assessment and evaluation results in changes being made to the proposed boundaries, a further consultation will be required where significant areas of additional land are proposed to be designated as AONB. If only minor boundary amendments are proposed, an additional consultation is unlikely to be required.**
- **Seek approval from NE Board** - with supporting evidence generated from the formal statutory and public consultation, to seek Natural England Board approval of a draft Order with regard to extending the boundary of the Surrey Hills AONB and approval to proceed to a formal period of Notice.
- **Notice period** - The draft legal Order would then be subject to a 28-day Notice period prior to submission to the Secretary of State (DEFRA) for confirmation. Legislation (CRoW Act 2000, Section 83) requires that before making a Variation Order, Natural England shall publish in the London Gazette and in one or more newspapers circulating in the area of every local authority whose area includes any part of the area to which the Order is to relate, notice that they intend to make the Order, indicating the effect of the

Order and stating the time within which and the manner in which representations with respect to the Order may be made to Natural England, and shall consider any representations duly made.

- The Notice period allows anyone who wishes to do so to make representations to Natural England, objecting to, supportive of, or proposing amendments to the Order, and stating the grounds on which they are made.
- Following analysis of all representations made during the Notice Period, Natural England Board will then be asked to give final approval for the submission of an Order for confirmation to the Secretary of State (Defra) varying the boundary of the Surrey Hills AONB. Natural England then 'makes' (signs and seals) the legal Order prior to submission to the Secretary of State.

It is not possible to say how long the Secretary of State's decision will take following submission or whether a Public Inquiry will be called.

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