

Draft MINUTES of the SURREY HILLS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY (NATIONAL LANDSCAPE) BOARD (SURREY HILLS BOARD) held at 13:30 on 6 March 2024 at Woodhatch Place, Reigate, Surrey

PRESENT:

Chair:

Kathy Atkinson Independent Chair

Core Members:

Councillor Marisa Heath	Surrey County Council*
Councillor Nadean Moses	Reigate & Banstead Borough Council
Councillor Catherine Sayer	Tandridge District Council
Councillor Ruth Reed	Waverley Borough Council*
Councillor Catherine Young	Guildford Borough Council*
Cllr Claire Malcolmson	Mole Valley District Council*
Stephen Rudd	Natural England
Stephanie Fudge	National Trust

Delivery Partners:

Gordon Jackson	Surrey Hills Society and Surrey Hills Trust Fund
Simon Whalley	Surrey Hills Enterprises Community Interest Company

Advisory Members:

John Goodridge	CPRE Surrey*
Mike Waite	Surrey Wildlife Trust*
Lucy Charman*	Country Land and Business Association*

Observer:

Jo Bradshaw Surrey Hills Arts

In attendance:

Rob Fairbanks	Surrey Hills National Landscape Director
Emma Cole	Surrey Hills National Landscape Communications Lead
Councillor Paul Deach	Surrey County Council
Ian Dunsford	Reigate & Banstead Borough Council
Sarah Thiele	Surrey Hills National Landscape Programme Manager*
Clive Smith	Surrey Hills AONB Planning Adviser
Carolyn McKenzie	Director of Environment, SCC
Sarah Quinn	Democratic Services, SCC (Minutes)
Sally Blake	Save Surrey Countryside*
Jenna Emmerton	Environmental Land Management Advisor
Ben McCallan	Climate Change Manager, SCC
Harriet Kittermaster	Political Assistant (Residents Association/Independent Group), SCC*

Patrick Bisgood
Katie Daw

Fetcham Residents Association*
Farm Care Co-ordinator, Surrey Hills
Society

*Attended remotely

1. CHAIR'S WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair welcomed the Board and observers to the meeting and asked those present and attending remotely to introduce themselves.

She reported on the following:

- Progress with the National Landscape AONB Boundary Extension and an exchange of letters with the Chief Executive of Natural England encouraging a timely conclusion of the project.
- Successful team awayday held recently between the Surrey Hills National Landscape Team and Surrey Wildlife Trust.
- Event on 24 April at Denbies; Julian Glover had been invited to speak as part of the 75th anniversary celebrations of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.
- Thanks to National Landscape Team for all their effort in light of a heavy workload.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Stuart MacLachlan, Surrey Association of Local Councils

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Board's meeting on 6 December 2023 were approved as a correct record of the meeting.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received by the deadline.

6. NATURAL ENGLAND AONB BOUNDARY EXTENSION UPDATE

Stephen Rudd provided an oral update on the Boundary Extension:

- The complexity of responses to the Boundary Extension consultation was high, but good progress was being made in working through them. The team would be visiting some of the

areas in order to examine them in more detail prior to the publication of the report.

- A 12-week public consultation period on any additional areas was required, but this would not need to be as extensive as the previous consultation. However, the timing of this could be affected by the calling of a General Election this year as no public consultations can be launched during the pre-election period.

The following key issues were raised during the discussion:

- The Chair thanked Stephen Rudd and team for all their hard work on this.
- It was suggested that Natural England publish information for stakeholders to inform them of the timescale for the project and the potential impact of a General Election.
- It was clarified that any further public consultation would take place primarily online, including webinars, together with potential face to face sessions with different stakeholder groups. Any future consultation would be in relation to additional areas newly proposed for inclusion in the National Landscape.
- Discussion took place regarding land identified as potential future National Landscape, and whether any weighting could be given to this status in the determination of current planning applications; concern was expressed that applications were being rushed through prior to any future designation. Clive Smith advised that these areas do not have any legal status at this early stage, but further weight could be given as the Boundary Extension Review progresses. He advised planning authorities to take into account the fact that specialist landscape consultants have assessed the landscape to meet Natural England's criteria for natural beauty, and this should be treated as a material planning consideration. However, the weight given to this is dependent on the decision maker. Stephen Rudd reiterated that until the land is designated as National Landscape, it is not protected by statute. It was also noted that any areas proposed for removal from AONB status were not subject to public consultation.
- Stephen Rudd requested that members of the Board contact him if they become aware of any significant planning applications in the proposed extension areas in order to facilitate an appropriate response by Natural England.

The Board **NOTED** the report.

7. MANAGEMENT PLAN (2025-2030) – A 75 YEAR VISION FOR A THRIVING SURRY HILLS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

In-person attendees took part in an outdoor exercise to help identify the environmental ceiling and social foundation for a 75-year vision for the Thriving National Landscape.

[The meeting adjourned between 14:15 and 15:20 to undertake the exercise.]

Rob Fairbanks, Surrey Hills National Landscape Director and Emma Cole, Surrey Hills National Landscape Communication Lead, gave a presentation on the 75 year vision for a thriving Surrey Hills National Landscape (attached as **Appendix A**).

The following key issues were raised during the discussion:

- A question was asked regarding the Surrey Hills Partnership and whether this will be looked at as part of the governance review. It was confirmed that it would be part of the review.
- Discussion took place regarding young people's involvement. It was noted that work was planned with schools to engage with the Letters from the Future campaign, and there would be video and multimedia content. Work was also taking place with the University of Surrey regarding the use of AI in the campaign.

The Board **AGREED** the programme for developing a new Management Plan for the Surrey Hills National Landscape.

8. WORKING GROUPS

Rob Fairbanks, Surrey Hills National Landscape Director, presented the report:

- It was noted that the different working groups had been set up in 2022, but the pressure on staff time meant that there was a need to focus on the management plan.
- Rather than segmenting different groups, the proposal was for all access users to be brought together under the Promoted Routes Working Group.

The following key issues were raised during the discussion:

- It was confirmed that the changes to the terms of reference were minor.
- Discussion took place as to whether these were the most important subjects for working groups. It was acknowledged that there were other important issues; however, as there was funding available for access work, the priority will be to focus on the Promoted Routes Working Group, including the Rail to Ramble programme and Active Travel campaigns.

The Board **AGREED** the refreshed Working Group Terms of Reference for the Promoted Routes Working Group.

9. SURREY HILLS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE FORWARD PLAN 2024-25

Rob Fairbanks, Surrey Hills National Landscape Director, presented the report and asked the leads for each pillar to update on their work:

Planning – Clive Smith

Clive Smith updated on recent planning issues, including the Haslemere public inquiry into dwellings in the National Landscape, and the Surrey University application for a solar installation near to the Hogs Back.

Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL) – Sarah Thiele

Sarah Thiele reported that substantial funding was available this year, and some projects across the National Landscape had started.

Surrey Hills Enterprises – Simon Whalley

Simon Whalley reported that membership is growing steadily. Future efforts will focus on securing a greater number of corporate partners and sponsors in order to maximise profit when running events. There are many potential corporate partners in the area who could benefit. There was also a drive to hold a centrally focussed event to bring the wider business population together to find out more about the Surrey Hills.

Surrey Hills Society – Gordon Jackson

Gordon Jackson reported that 280 volunteers had been engaged during the winter, and two major new projects had begun: Growing Together, which was aimed at conservation and inclusion in the countryside with funding from the Heritage Fund, and the East Surrey Farm Care Project led by Katie Daw, aimed at improving mental health and wellbeing outcomes for individuals and groups with anxiety and depression, as well as better health and financial outcomes for farmers.

Surrey Hills Arts – Jo Bradshaw

Jo Bradshaw agreed to update at the next meeting.

The Chair thanked Sally Blake for her work on SSSIs and sending a copy of her report.

The Board **APPROVED** the work plan for 2024-25.

10. MEETING DATES FOR 2024

Friday 7 June 2024
Wednesday 4 September 2024
Wednesday 11 December 2024

All scheduled 1.30pm – 4.30pm; venues to be confirmed.

The meeting closed at 16:03

Kathy Atkinson
Independent Chair