

**MINUTES of the SURREY HILLS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY (NATIONAL LANDSCAPE) BOARD (SURREY HILLS BOARD) AGM** held at 1:30pm on 26 September 2024 at West Horsley Place, Epsom Road, Leatherhead, Surrey

**PRESENT:**

<p><b>Chair:</b> Kathy Atkinson</p> <p><b>Core Members:</b> Councillor Catherine Young Councillor Claire Malcolmson Councillor Catherine Sayer Councillor Marisa Heath Stephen Rudd Stephanie Fudge</p> <p><b>Delivery Partners:</b> Gordon Jackson Simon Whalley</p> <p><b>Advisory Members:</b> Mike Waite Lucy Charman</p> <p><b>In Attendance:</b> Rob Fairbanks Emma Cole Oliver Wild Sarah Thiele Carolyn McKenzie Alison Clarke Joss Butler Harriet Hendrick Sally Blake Ian Dunsford Ramsey Nagaty Adam Bolton Elona Harris</p> <p>*Attended remotely</p>	<p>Independent Chair</p> <p>Guildford Borough Council Mole Valley District Council Tandridge District Council* Surrey County Council* Natural England National Trust</p> <p>Surrey Hills Society and Surrey Hills Trust Fund Surrey Hills Enterprises Community Interest Company*</p> <p>Surrey Wildlife Trust* Country Land and Business Association</p> <p>Surrey Hills National Landscape Director Surrey Hills National Landscape Communications Lead Surrey Hills National Landscape Business Support Officer Surrey Hills National Landscape Programme Manager Director of Environment, SCC* Surrey Hills Arts (Observer) Democratic Services, SCC (Minutes) National Farmers Union* Save Surrey Countryside Surrey Hills Technical Advisory Group Campaign to Protect Rural England SALC Surrey Hills Board Advisor CEO of West Horsley Place</p>
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**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.

The Chair made the following announcements:

- Additional funding from the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) created delivery challenges due to limited team capacity.
- There was uncertainty surrounding funding beyond the next financial year, particularly in relation to protected landscapes the Spending Review.
- Noted potential issues related to the Boundary Extension. The Surrey Hills was funded 75% by DEFRA and 25% by the constituent local authorities and so a change to the DEFRA funding would have a significant impact on Local Authorities.

## **2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Cllr Ruth Reed, Cllr Nadean Moses, Stephanie Fudge, John Goodridge, Tim Bamford, Stuart McLachlan, Romy Jackson & Deborah Sherry.

- Harriet Hendrick acted as a substitute for Romy Jackson (attended remotely).
- Lucy Charman acted as a substitute for Tim Bamford.
- Ramsey Nagaty acted as a substitute for John Goodridge.
- Adam Bolton acted as a substitute for Deborah Sherry.

## **PRESENTATION: WEST HORSLEY PLACE INITIATIVES**

Elona Harris, CEO of West Horsley Place, provided the Board with a presentation on the ongoing work of West Horsley Place, the venue for the meeting. Members noted details on:

- Conservation of heritage buildings and biodiversity improvement projects on the 400-acre estate.
- Community and education programs, such as school collaborations with Guildford Shakespeare Company.
- Future plans for a major capital campaign to enhance estate facilities.

## **SURREY NATURE DAY**

Adam Bolton provided details on the upcoming Surrey Nature Day:

- Scheduled for 27–28 September 2024.
- Activities include interactive educational theatre, partner stalls, and a public open day.

## **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None declared.

## **4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2024 were approved, subject to the following amendment:

- Item 5 (Sally Blake – Public Question): correction - stated that concerns about filming at Thursley National Nature Reserve pertained to "noise and disturbance on wildlife" and not noise causing concern to local residents.

## **5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

1. Mark Frost did not ask a supplementary question.

2. Sally Blake asked a supplementary question on behalf of John Oliver. This was:

I was pleased that Natural England confirmed that activity was supervised by an experienced ecologist who could prevent any damaging effects on wildlife. However, section 38 is truly about the prevention or impeding of access to any common land. I was concerned to learn that, quote, “the film production companies ... were instructed that they must not unduly restrict or obstruct access”.

Section 38, in its application, does not contain such shadings of meaning. If access would be prevented or impeded to any extent by restricted works, consent should be sought from the Planning Inspectorate beforehand. This being the case, could you – particularly, the Natural England representative:

- Quote the definition of “unduly restrict or obstruct access” that is given to the film companies to indicate when an application should, in Natural England’s view, be made to the Planning Inspectorate
- Explain what measures are put in place to monitor whether the film companies prevent or restrict access to any of the common land during the film companies’ use of the common; and
- Confirm that, in the current year, no fencing, structures (as described in my original question) or any security measures of any sort, were put in place on the common which prevented or impeded access to any of the common land during the film companies’ use of the common?

In response, Stephen Rudd, Natural England, referred to the formal public question response published on 25 September 2024.

3. Sally Blake asked the following supplementary question:

Your Management Plan 2020-2025 requires you to prepare a State of the Surrey Hills AONB report with baseline data for 15 indicators set out in the Plan which I listed in my question.

This is the whole measure of success or otherwise of the Surrey Hills National Landscape over the last 5 years and it should have been monitored regularly.

The answer I have received tells me this report is not mandatory and you are not going to produce it.

But it is mandatory. Each one of your 6 Councils adopted this Management Plan and, thereby, placed an obligation upon the Board to deliver its contents, including a State of the Surrey Hills AONB report. It is probably the most important document the Board was mandated to produce. It should have been a priority for your resources.

Why has this not been raised with the Board over the last 5 years, and when are you now going to produce it?

In response, Rob Fairbanks, Surrey Hills National Landscape Director, stated that he believed the formal question response was sound and restated that it was not mandatory to have a State of the Surrey Hills report. The Director said that the response acknowledged that it was an area that needed greater resource and added that there was a work scheme within DEFRA to take leadership in setting targets and outcomes for all Surrey landscapes.

The Chairman added that she believed the service could improve on choosing indicators that they have the ability to monitor regularly. Further to this, the Chairman added that whether the upcoming report was titled 'the state of the Surrey Hills' or 'a review of the management plan', a report would be considered in the future to review the current status, indicators and future work.

## **6. NATURAL ENGLAND AONB BOUNDARY EXTENSION UPDATE**

Stephen Rudd, Natural England, provided a verbal update on the Boundary Extension:

- Provided an overview on the process of varying an existing AONB boundary and the stages of the designation process.
- That 1500 consultation responses had been received and the majority of responses were in favour of the proposals.
- 27 new areas in Surrey and three in East Hampshire were identified for inclusion, expanding the Surrey Hills AONB by 30%.
- A second public consultation would run for 12 weeks from 17 September 2024 until 10 December 2024, with face-to-face events planned on the 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2024 and 18<sup>th</sup> October 2024.
- Members of the Board were provided with an overview on how to provide a response to the consultation and next steps.

Catherine Sayer asked whether the face-to-face drop-in session at Oxted Community Hall was confirmed. Stephen Rudd stated that the session was not yet confirmed and that Board members would be notified once more detail was available.

The Chairman thanked Stephen Rudd for the update.

The Board NOTED the boundary extension update.

## **7. SURREY HILLS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE**

The Chairman introduced the item and noted that the new management plan would run for a 5-year period but added that there was an ambition to also have a 75-year vision for the Surrey Hills National Landscape. The Chairman provided an overview of the current challenges, which included:

- Waiting for final DEFRA guidance about required content of the management plan however it was understood that there would be four high level categories: climate, nature, people and place. Targets had been set but will apply to a number of protected landscapes so further work was required to assign these targets to the different areas.
- There was an additional challenge due to the boundary extension project which may impact targets once confirmed.

The Chairman stated that the aim was to have a draft management plan prepared for early 2025, which would be available for consultation by local authorities

Rob Fairbank, Surrey Hills National Landscape Director, provided updates on development of the plan, related challenges and what is being asked of Board members.

- It was noted that it had been challenging to complete in addition to regular day-to-day duties but accept it is absolutely core to the purpose.
- That Climate change was an additional challenge.
- A 75-year vision was being developed but there would also be a statutory five-year plan. This would be monitored and reviewed in relation to the targets.
- All national hills and landscapes were funded by DEFRA and had to demonstrate how they deliver on the four core outcomes. The Chairman added that she considered the DEFRA targets to be a minimum and that the service needed to be more ambitious.
- An artist has also been commissioned to illustrate the special qualities and features within the Surrey Hills landscapes that the Management Plan will seek to conserve and enhance over the next 75 years.
- Julian Glover launched the 'Postcards from the Future' campaign. This was a project with Surrey University to target groups and the public to describe a 75-year vision for a Thriving National Landscape which is greener, happier, healthier and open to all. These postcards can be created online or physically at Surrey Hills attended events, including Hampton Court and some educational activities. The postcards had been synthesised using AI to create a Vision for the Surrey Hills and the priorities for Nature, People and Climate. This will be the subject of the public survey.
- Workshops in October 2024 and a public symposium on 13 November 2024 would gather stakeholder input. The Chairman added that the workshops were an important opportunity to engage with partners.
- The consultation report and the draft Surrey Hills Management Plan would be considered by the Surrey Hills Board in December 2024. It is anticipated that following this there will be a 12-week consultation to agree the document for the Board to consider in March 2025, to then recommend to the constituent local authorities to formally adopt as a statutory plan setting out how they would seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the National Landscape. Members of the Board stressed the importance of proper consultation with residents and Local Authorities.
- The Chairman asked Board Members to promote participation in the consultation in their respective areas.

The Board:

1. Noted the progress and outline programme for developing a new Management Plan for the Surrey Hills National Landscape
2. Agreed to participate in one of the Expert Panel meetings and promotion of the Surrey Hills Symposium

## **8. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT PLAN MONITORING AND FINANCE REPORT**

### **GOVERNANCE REVIEW**

- The Director introduced the item and provided Members with a brief overview as outlined in the published report.
- It was noted that the Joint Advisory Committee constitution was agreed in October 2013 but no formal review had been undertaken since. Changes have been reported to the Board but not reviewed.
- The Chairman and officers had engaged with Natural England/Defra about using Surrey Hills as a case study for governance reform.
- Gordon Jackson, Simon Whalley, and Catherine Sayer volunteered for the steering group. The Chairman asked members of the Local Authority board members to notify officers if they wish to join the steering group

## **RISK REGISTER**

The board reviewed and approved the risk register, noting the key risks:

- Uncertainty regarding DEFRA funding post-March 2025.
- Impacts of reduced local authority contributions.

## **FINANCE – OUTTURN AND ESTIMATES**

The Director stated that, at the AGM, the Board usually agreed the outturn report for the previous year's accounts and agreed the core estimates for the following financial year. However, it is proposed to present the estimates to the December Board meeting along with the recommendations for the new Constitution and funding formula. It is also hoped that further Defra guidance on funding and the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review will be known by then. The Board agreed to the proposal.

## **SURREY HILLS MANAGEMENT PLAN (2020 – 2025)**

The update on the activities related to the implementation of the Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan (2020 – 2025) report which provided 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. Members of the Board noted an overview of each pillar, as outlined in the published report.

The Board:

1. Agreed the proposals for a governance review and representation on the Steering Group
2. Approved the Risk Register and note the actions arising
3. Agreed the proposal to present the Outturn for 2023/2024 and the Estimates for 2025/2026 to be presented to the December Board meeting
4. Noted and advise on the Surrey Hills Management Plan (2020 – 2025) Monitoring Framework

## **9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

None.

## **10. MEETING DATES FOR 2024**

The Board noted that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday 11 December 2024,  
1.30pm

2025 meetings dates:

5 March 2025 (13:30pm)

4 June 2025 (13:30pm)

17 September 2024 (13:30pm)

3 December 2025 (13:30pm)

The meeting closed at: 2:26

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**Kathy Atkinson**  
**Independent Chair**