

MINUTES of the SURREY HILLS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY (NATIONAL LANDSCAPE) BOARD (SURREY HILLS BOARD) held at 2:00pm on 11 December 2024 at Mole Valley Council Offices, Pippbrook, Dorking.

MEMBERS PRESENT*

<p>Chair: Kathy Atkinson*</p> <p>Core Members: Councillor Catherine Young* Councillor Claire Malcolmson* Councillor Nadean Moses* Councillor Catherine Sayer* Councillor Ruth Reed* Councillor Marisa Heath* Stephen Rudd Stephanie Fudge</p> <p>Delivery Partners: Gordon Jackson* Michael Coughlin*</p> <p>Advisory Members: Mike Waite* Harriett Henrick John Goodridge Lucy Charman* Deborah Sherry</p> <p>Observer: Alison Clarke* Sally Blake*</p>	<p>Independent Chair</p> <p>Guildford Borough Council Mole Valley District Council Reigate and Banstead Borough Council Tandridge District Council Waverley Borough 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 National Farmers Union Campaign to Protect Rural England Country Land and Business Association Surrey Association of Local Councils</p> <p>Surrey Hills Arts Public attendee</p>
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1. CHAIR'S WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair welcomed the Board and observers to the meeting.

The Chair made the following announcements:

- Highlighted concerns regarding future government funding for protected landscapes and noted the vocal stance of National Parks on this issue. The Chair emphasised the need to fight to retain core funding and make a case for both revenue and capital funding for farming and protected landscapes.
- Mentioned the interest in making the organisation more resilient and potentially generating other income sources.

- Discussed major planning applications and the enhanced duty on public bodies to further the purpose of the national landscape.
- Expressed disappointment with Guildford Borough Council Planning Committee's approval of the University of Surrey's Solar Farm installation on land West of Blackwell Farm.
- Mentioned writing to the Planning Inspector regarding a rerun of an appeal to the development of 110 houses adjacent to a national landscape. The Chair highlighted the importance of supporting residents' groups against inappropriate developments.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Stephanie Fudge.

James Nicholson acted as a substitute for Stephanie Fudge

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2024 were approved.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Two public questions were received by the deadline. The questions and responses are attached to these minutes.

1. Cllr David Munro (Waverley Borough Council) did not attend to ask a supplementary question.
2. Mr Rob Hills did not attend to ask a supplementary question.

The Chair asked if there were any further questions for the Board:

Ms Sally Blake asked for confirmation that the new Management Plan, and the Board's targets, would be based solely upon the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Targets and Outcomes for Nature, Climate, and Access and Heritage, not on growing the Surrey Hills economy, which was stated to be not the purpose of AONB designation, and that the performance would be monitored and publicly reported upon at least annually using the DEFRA Performance Indicators.

In response, the Chair confirmed that the Board's targets would align with DEFRA's targets but may extend beyond them in certain areas. Additionally, the Chair emphasised that performance would be assessed on an annual basis.

6. NATURAL ENGLAND AONB BOUNDARY EXTENSION UPDATE

Stephen Rudd, Natural England, was unable to attend the meeting due to sickness.

The Chair provided a brief update on the Natural England AONB boundary extension, noting that the consultation period for the proposed boundary changes had recently concluded, with approximately 350 responses received. The next steps would involve reviewing these

responses, and the Chair expressed hope that, by the next meeting, more detailed information on the consultation results and the subsequent process would be available.

7. SURREY HILLS MANAGEMENT PLAN

Rob Fairbanks, Director of Surrey Hills National Landscape, delivered an update to the Board, outlining the progress made and the next steps. He explained the process of developing the management plan, which included public engagement, workshops, and surveys. The Director emphasised the importance of supporting local communities and economies, improving public health and wellbeing, driving nature recovery, and enhancing resilience to climate change, in line with DEFRA's vision.

The Director outlined the public engagement process for developing the management plan, which included collecting 200 postcards from the public, and conducting a survey from October to November 2024.

The Director highlighted several workshops and surveys conducted to gather input for the management plan, including a partner workshop on November 22nd and a symposium on November 13th. These events aimed to gather feedback on the vision statements and policy framework.

The Director noted the survey headlines which included the importance of a landscape mosaic, importance of woodland and trees, the need for landscape management, a lack of concern about visitor numbers and a high level of concern over traffic and development. He further emphasised the need for a long-term vision and the importance of aligning with national targets and local nature recovery strategies. The Board further noted the 'big ideas' to be embedded into the plan which included:

- Need for greater infrastructure investment into walking, cycling and public rights of way to enhance and manage visitor experience
- Zoning priority areas for recreation and nature
- Use of technology, identify how drones will use / impact on landscape (using air space not roads to deliver products)
- Deer and squirrel management
- Creating a circular, Doughnut economy
- Protect what we have as priority and enforce
- Growing areas, productive land including horticulture and allotments
- Collaboration – working on a landscape scale
- Education and awareness of Surrey Hills campaigns
- Embracing technology

Board Members emphasised the importance of creating sufficient pathways to encourage visitors to explore the Surrey Hills, as well as providing suitable parking areas and public transport to ensure a seamless start to their experience in the region.

The Director updated the Board on key areas of concern, including the impacts of climate change, housing development, the future of farming, the demand for nationally important infrastructure, spatial planning and zoning, as well as uncertainty surrounding funding and investment.

At the conclusion of the presentation, the Director outlined the next steps, which included designing the consultation programme and incorporating online feedback, conducting equality impact assessments, and completing habitat regulation assessments. A workshop was scheduled for February 2025, with the Board expected to sign off the consultation draft in March 2025.

Resolved:

The Board:

1. Noted the progress and outline programme for developing a new Management Plan for the Surrey Hills National Landscape
2. Considered the pre-Consultation Draft Management Plan
3. Agreed to delegate to the Surrey Hills Board Chair and the Surrey Hills Officers Working Group Chair to sign off the Surrey Hills Management Plan for Consultation.

8. SURREY HILLS GOVERNANCE REVIEW

Mike King and Clare Featherston from Resources for Change introduced the item and provided the Board with a presentation. The following points were noted:

- The governance review aimed to assess the existing Joint Advisory Committee structure and propose a new version for consideration by the board.
- Considerations include the proposed boundary review, the Super National Nature Reserve, the complexity of the current structure, and good governance practices from other organisations.
- A survey was conducted among board members and the Officers Working Group to gather feedback on the current governance structure.
- Key findings from the survey indicated a lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities, a need for a smaller, more engaged executive group, and concerns about the board's ability to make decisions and enact them.
- Challenges identified included the need for greater transparency, better alignment with planning authorities, and a more robust mechanism for discussing concerns.
- Suggestions for improvement included creating a smaller executive group with clear roles, improving the chair and board selection process, and having more regular updates and communication.
- The next steps involved conducting a series of online structured discussions in the New Year with a wider range of stakeholders.
- Findings from discussions would be analysed and fed back to an in-person workshop in February 2025.

A Board Member asked about the importance of nature in the Surrey Hills and how the Board focuses on nature conservation and the protection of natural beauty. It was emphasised that there was a need for clarity on the legal requirements and the role of partners and stakeholders in achieving these goals. The response highlighted the importance of clarity in roles and responsibilities, especially regarding nature conservation. Further to this, the Board discussed the importance of having an appropriate membership on the Board with key stakeholders represented.

The Board discussed possible governance structures to explore. Further to this, the Board held a discussion about maintaining the day-to-day operations effectively and the possibility of having a clear decision-making flowchart to improve understanding and transparency.

The Chair drew the Board's attention to a workshop scheduled for February 2025, where the management plan and governance review would be discussed alongside the Board members.

Resolved:

The Board noted the presentation.

9. SURREY HILLS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE FORWARD PLAN

Rob Fairbanks, Director of Surrey Hills National Landscape, introduced the report and provided a summary as outlined in the published report.

Resolved:

Members approved the work plan for 2024 - 25

10. MEETING DATE

The Board noted the date of the next meeting.

The meeting closed at: 4:05

**Kathy Atkinson
Independent Chair**

Joint Advisory Committee for the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

11 December 2024

PROCEDURAL MATTERS – PUBLIC QUESTIONS

1. Public Question submitted by Cllr David Munro (Waverley Borough Council)

I am one of the Waverley Borough Council ward members for Western Commons. My ward covers some of the most important areas within Surrey Hills National Landscapes, including Frensham Common, Thursley Common and much of the Devils Punchbowl. These areas are much loved by local residents and I would like to thank members and staff of the Surrey Hills National Landscape Board for their tireless efforts to protect and enhance these magnificent tracts of countryside.

However, I am picking up two areas of concern:

1. Some of the Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs) are, in the opinion of many local residents including myself, over-used by motor traffic, particularly recreational 4x4s and motorbikes. This is leading to a degradation of the BOATs themselves, disturbance to wildlife and annoyance to other users.
2. Signage designed to inform visitors about the threats to wildlife, particularly uncontrolled dogs during the nesting season, is frequently contradictory and in many cases don't strike what I consider to be a reasonable balance between the need to protect wildlife, particularly ground-nesting birds and rare reptiles, and the understandable desire of responsible walkers to let their dogs off the lead in areas where this can be permitted without too much harm.

Could I ask that the next Management Plan now being formulated addresses both these issues, with a view to better regulation of intrusive motor traffic, and consistent and well-advertised policies to strike a balance between dogs and wildlife.

I appreciate that neither of these issues are easy ones to address, and that the Board does not have the powers of regulation that some of us would like to see - but it would be good if the Board could provide a clear steer and leadership to tackle both these contentious problems.

Reply:

Dear David

Thank you for your public question.

Regarding BOATS, I acknowledge that there have been long-standing concerns around recreational motorised vehicles in the countryside, particularly their impact on the natural

environment and enjoyment by others of National Parks and our Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The position of the Surrey Hills Management Plan will be to promote the responsible use of byways by all users to advise on the management of BOATS to reduce user conflict and environmental damage. This recognises the legal rights of users and that it is often a minority that cause most damage. When considering the need for a Traffic Regulation Order, the Management Plan will align with the Surrey County Council policy, emphasising the Council's legal duty in taking action to seek to further the purpose of the Surrey Hills designation.

Regarding the impact of dogs on protected sites, this is a major concern to the Surrey Hills National Landscape and as such is a priority to address in the Management Plan. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy consultation has also identified that disturbance by dogs is one of the main threats to nature recovery, particularly the success of ground nest birds.

We are working closely with Natural England and other partners on the Board, like Surrey Wildlife Trust and the National Trust, to address this. This includes through the development of Heathland Connections and the progression of a Super National Nature Reserve for the Wealden Heath SPA that will cover a large area of the Surrey Hills National Landscape.

One particular project is a research proposal with Surrey University to observe impacts and apply best practice. The evidence is that signage is not effective by itself and needs to be implemented in conjunction with physical measures like using natural vegetation (dead hedging) to create positive 'sensory areas' for dogs off-lead and to restrict access and keep dogs on-lead in more sensitive areas. This includes keeping dogs out of ponds and the National Trust and Natural England have established best practice that needs to be evidenced and applied to other areas through the project. There is also the opportunity to extend public space protection orders.

The team would be delighted to brief you further on this work.

2. Public Question submitted by Mr Rob Hills:

The Surrey Hills National Landscape Board have a duty of care to the many wild and owned animals that live in the area. Many local residents have dogs, cats, horses and other animals who are regularly traumatised by random firework events that occur from October to January each year. The current UK law is totally inadequate in protecting animals or the many sensitive individuals.

While the Surrey Hills National Landscape area is not as badly affected as the many more built up areas, it should be a place for those seeking a more sheltered home to live peacefully with their animals.

Please can I ask the Surrey Hills Board to consider the idea of introducing an Private Exclusion Zone in the Surrey Hills National Landscape area that would only permit licenced firework displays at specific locations and a published times.

Reply:

Dear Mr Hills

I acknowledge the disturbance caused by fireworks and note that this activity is occurring over prolonged periods. Thank you for raising this with the Surrey Hills National Landscape Board.

I will pursue with the local authority the potential use of a Private Exclusion Zone and respond to you in due course.

Kathy Atkinson

Independent Chairman of the Joint Advisory Committee for the Surrey Hills National Landscape

11 December 2024