



Surrey Hills
National
Landscape



**National
Landscapes**
Association

Surrey Hills National Landscape Management Plan

Consultation Draft for 2025-2030
March 2025

Preface

The Surrey Hills was one of the first areas in the country to be designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1958, now promoted as a National Landscape. It stretches across rural Surrey, covering about a quarter of the county, and is one of 34 National Landscapes in England.

Today the Surrey Hills would in many ways be barely recognisable to the legislators of 1949, let alone those who built the Cistercian abbeys and churches dotted around this landscape. In other ways it has changed little. Over the centuries, the mosaic of farmland, woodland, heaths, downs and commons has inspired some of the country's greatest artists, writers and architects - looking at 18th century artworks of Box Hill, the distinctive landscape and view is still the same, even if the road is wider and the sound of traffic drowns out the skylark and nightingale.

An important reflection is how the risk of 'death by a thousand cuts' faces our countryside, how a long running series of small cumulative changes - a hedgerow grubbed up here, a pond filled in there, new buildings emerging - have all led to an impact that is often barely noticeable on human timescales but adds up to major change when viewed over a longer period. Only when we look at old maps and photos do we begin to see the impact of decades of cumulative change.

The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 now requires relevant authorities to actively "seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty" of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), or National Landscapes, as they are now known.

This is a statutory duty, not discretionary, meaning that all relevant authorities must comply. The duty strengthens the previous "duty of regard" under section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, pushing for tangible, positive outcomes for the natural beauty of our National Landscapes.

In the context of planning, relevant authorities include:

- Local Planning Authorities
- The Planning Inspectorate
- The Secretary of State
- Parish Councils preparing Neighbourhood Plans

YEAR TWENTY-ONE HUNDRED

by Rosie-May Jones

A Vision for the Surrey Hills as a thriving place for people and nature

Inspired by our “Postcards from the Future” campaign

Have you ever wondered
About the year twenty-one hundred?
Are you filled with hopes or with fears
For what the world will be in seventy-five years?
Do you think about what will be gained or what might be lost,
Of our hills and hedges, fields and forests,
Chalk streams and rivers, woodlands and downs,
To the urban sprawl of cities and towns?
Do you think our children’s children will look back and say
Thank you for the choices we are making today?
Thank you for declaring Nature has Rights,
Thank you for not giving up the fight,
Despite housing pressures and sewage in our rivers,
Over consumption and carbon emissions,
Thank you for holding to your convictions,
In that terrible time of mass extinctions,
Thank you to the people of the twenty first century,
Who fought to reestablish natural biodiversity,
Who stopped the clock on wildlife slipping away,
Turning their thoughts and actions towards better days.

Can you see them silently flying in hydrogen automobiles?
Across wildflower meadows and grassy green fields,
Pointing out the beavers building their dams,
As they glide alongside eagles' grand wingspans,
Our natural capital splendid and abundant,
Kaleidoscopes of butterflies swarming triumphant
Along green corridors from the centre of London Town
Stretching across Surrey Hills all the way to the South Downs,
With protection for wildlife and our public rights of way,
And lost species reintroduced through technology and DNA,
High-capacity solar power and ocean-salt derived batteries,
Charging community conservation and restoration strategies,
For bees and box trees, newts and bats,
Woodlands and wetlands, and otters on riverbanks,
The creation and recovery of protected habitats,
For quiet contemplation and beauty preservation
With an eco-infrastructure to welcome all the population,
Nurturing a national vision of long-term management,
With the understanding that soil, seed and water are sacrosanct,
With countryside stewardship and regenerative agriculture,
Cultivating a comprehensive appreciation for nature
In twenty-one hundred, what a time to be alive
Where all species are treasured and given space to thrive

How to use this Plan

- Part 1. Introduction to National Landscapes. This sets the scene regarding the 1949 Act, the National Landscape designation, the status of the Management Plan and the Core Principles at the heart of securing the long-term vision.
- Part 2. The Surrey Hills National Landscape. This includes the Statement of Significance as to why the Surrey Hills is designated as a National Landscape, the pressures and threats, and the outstanding qualities that need to be conserved and enhanced.
- Part 3. The 75-year Vision for the Surrey Hills. This includes the vision statement for 2100 for Nature, People and Climate arising out of the Postcard from the Future engagement process. It includes an appraisal of the past, present and future to set out the Targets for each theme and the proposed Strategic Priorities that need to be delivered over the next 75 years.
- Part 4. The Policy Framework for 2025 – 2030. This sets out the policy objectives as guidance to Responsible Bodies on how to seek to further the purpose of the designation, in line with the LURA 2023 duty.
- Part 5. The Delivery Strategy. This includes guidance to Responsible Bodies, a Surrey Hills Charter for wider society, and the role of the Surrey Hills Board, Strategy Groups, Partnership, the Brand Strategy and the monitoring of the targets.

Contents

Part 1. National Landscapes

[1.1 The 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act](#)

[1.2 The Glover Review](#)

1.3 The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (2023)

[1.4 The Vision for National Landscapes](#)

[1.5 The Core Principles](#)

[1.6 Preparing the Management Plan](#)

[1.7 The Strategic Environmental Assessment](#)

1.8 The Equality Impact Assessment

Part 2. The Surrey Hills National Landscape

2.1 Introduction

2.2 An historic environment

2.3 The Statement of Significance

2.4 Pressures and Threats

2.5 The Special Qualities of the Surrey Hills

2.5.1 Hills and Views

2.5.2 Woodland

2.5.3 Heathland

2.5.4 Commons

2.5.5 Chalk downland

2.5.6 Water: Rivers and Ponds

2.5.7 Agricultural land

2.5.8 Boundary features

2.5.9 Parkland and historic landscape features

2.5.10 Routeways: Country Lanes and Rights of Way

2.5.11 Settlements and the built heritage

2.5.12 Tranquillity and Dark Skies

Part 3. The 75 Year Vision

Thriving Plants and Animals

3.1 The Vision

3.2 Strategic Targets

3.3 Past, Present, Future

3.4 The Surrey Hills Nature Recovery Strategy

3.5 Long-term Strategic Priorities for Thriving Plants and Animals

Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement

3.6 The Vision

3.7 Strategic Targets

3.8 Past, Present, Future

3.9 Long Term Strategic Priorities for Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement

3.9.1 Improving public access & engagement

3.9.2 Supporting a thriving rural community

3.9.3 Protecting heritage and landscape

Mitigating and adapting to climate change

3.10 The Vision

3.11 Strategic Targets

3.12 Past, Present, Future

3.13 Long-term Strategic Priorities for reducing agricultural carbon emissions

3.13.1 Reducing agricultural carbon emissions

3.13.2 Reducing transport emissions

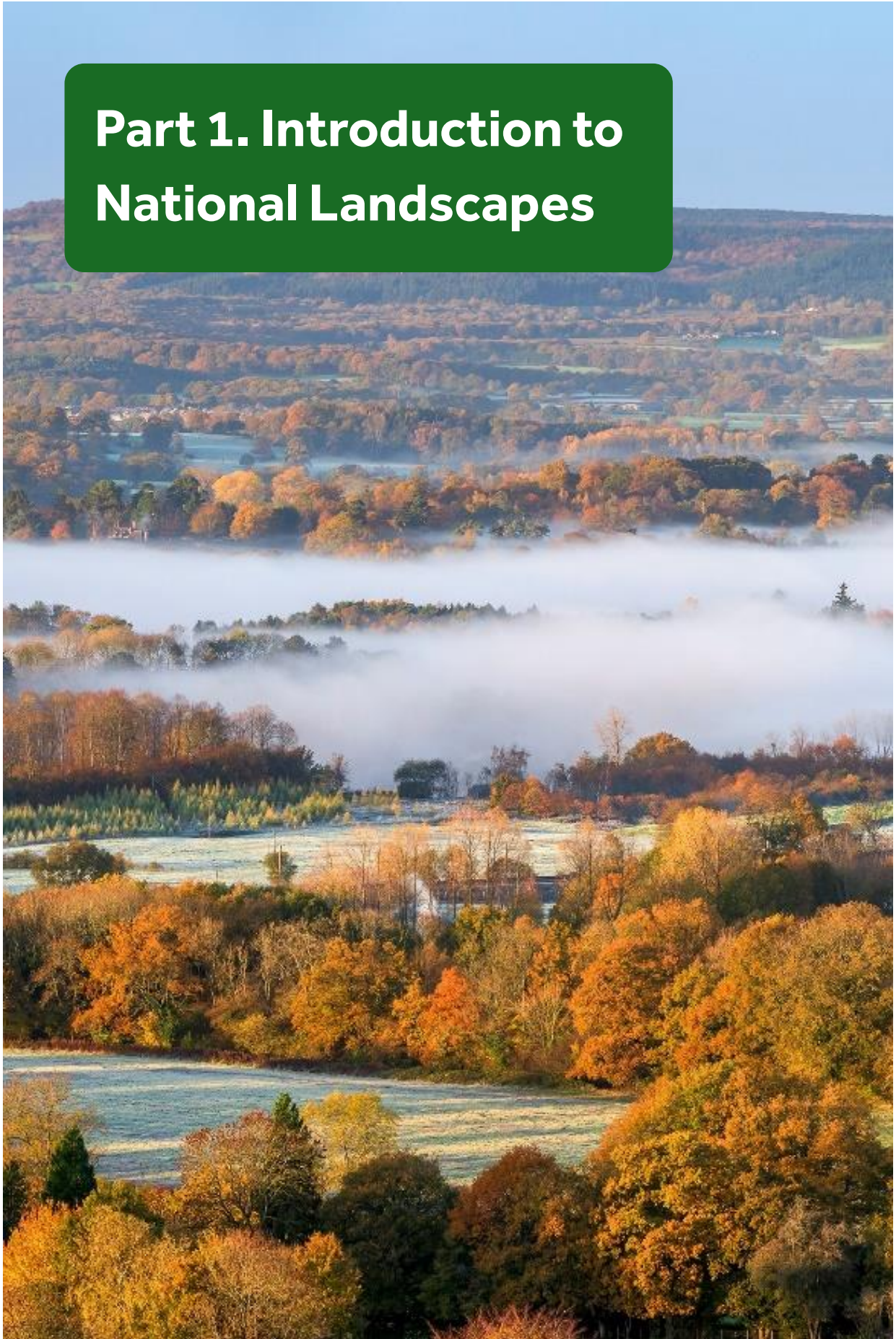
Part 4. The Policy Framework 2025 - 2030

- 4.1 Arts and Cultural Heritage
- 4.2 Biodiversity and Water Resources
- 4.3 Economy, Tourism and Community Development
- 4.4 Farming
- 4.5 Planning
- 4.6 Recreation, Health and Wellbeing
- 4.7 Transport
- 4.8 Woodlands, Hedgerows and Veteran Trees

Part 5. Delivery Strategy, Monitoring and Review (2025 – 2030)

- 5.1 Guidance to Responsible Bodies
- 5.2 A Surrey Hills Charter
- 5.3 National Landscape Partnerships
- 5.4 The Surrey Hills Brand
- 5.5 The Surrey Hills Team
- 5.6 Strategy Groups
- 5.7 The Partnership
- 4.6 Monitoring and review

Part 1. Introduction to National Landscapes



This section of the Plan sets out the legislative context to the Surrey Hills National Landscape, from the 1949 National Park and Access to the Countryside Act, to the designation of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1958, the Glover Review of Designated Landscapes, which are now promoted as National Landscapes.

Explained is the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (2023) that has placed a legal duty on Responsible Bodies to seek to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of our National Landscapes.

The process of developing this consultation Management Plan and the Core Principles that guide the priorities and actions, ensuring a thriving, sustainable future for the Surrey Hills as a National Landscape, are set out.

Contents

Part 1. National Landscapes

[1.1 The 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act](#)

[1.2 The Glover Review](#)

[1.3 Legislative Context](#)

[1.4 The Vision for National Landscapes](#)

[1.5 The Core Principles](#)

[1.6 Preparing the Management Plan](#)

[1.7 The Strategic Environmental Assessment](#)

1.8 The Equality Impact Assessment

1.1 The 1949 National Park and Access to the Countryside Act

In 1949, the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act created the legal structure supporting our protected landscapes - National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, now called National Landscapes.

It is difficult to underestimate just how radical this legislation was, adopted at a time when the country was attempting to recover from the trauma of the Second World War, and driven by the urgent need to build upon the promise of a land 'fit for heroes', despite severe austerity. The parallels with our own times, and the lessons learned about the importance of the countryside for health and wellbeing during the recent pandemic, are clear.

The work leading to the adoption of the 1949 Act laid out the principles on which protected landscapes were founded. Legislators reviewed the different types of provision for National Parks in different countries and made recommendations about provision for everything from nature conservation, the 'preservation and enhancement of natural beauty' through touring, walking and camping opportunities.

Instrumental to this post-war movement that set out the original vision for our protected landscapes was Sir Arthur Hobhouse in his seminal 1947 report:

"Certain regions of the English countryside possess a distinctive character whose nature and value depend partly on the physical structure of the country, the rocks of which it is composed and the sculpturing of hill and valley, partly on the local climate, partly on the natural and semi-natural vegetation that may be present, and partly on the crops that are grown and the agricultural regime. All these elements blend into a whole which often possesses both singular beauty and high scientific interest, and the defacement or disappearance of the distinctive characters of such a region involves an irreparable loss which it is hard to overestimate."

The report went on to discuss the definition and purpose of conservation areas (now National Landscapes) as being:

There are many areas of fine country and coast in England and Wales which are not included in our selection of National Parks but yet possess outstanding landscape beauty, are often of great scientific interest and, in many cases, include important holiday areas. While in the main they do not call for the degree of positive management required in National Parks, nor for the closer scientific control which may be necessary in National Nature Reserves, their contribution to the wider enjoyment of the countryside is so important that special measures should be taken to preserve their natural beauty and interest. Indeed, we regard our proposals for these areas as an essential corollary to our

National Park scheme... We recommend therefore, that the Minister of Town and Country Planning should designate areas of high landscape quality, scientific interest and recreational value as Conservation Areas.

Since this legislation was introduced, the countryside has seen constant and expansive change: changes in agricultural practices brought about by the post-war agricultural revolution; the introduction of the Common Agricultural Plan (CAP); and, most recently, Brexit; as well as wider changes in society, population dynamics, commuting and the constant growth of the motor car and air travel. This has all had an impact on our protected landscapes, and the communities that live and work in them and for those who visit them. However, the 1949 Act remains vitally important in the way it set out the priorities that we are familiar with today, the post-war settlement and principles of town and country planning, and the legislation that created National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

It is this post-war vision, which has guided our work over the last seventy-five years, that will continue to guide our work into the future.

1.2 The Glover Review

Seven decades after the visionary report by Sir Arthur Hobhouse, as part of the 25 Year Environment Plan, the government asked Julian Glover to lead an expert panel looking at how these protections could be renewed. The aim of the review was to ask whether the protections for National Parks and AONBs were still fit for purpose. In 2019, the Glover Report concluded that:

Our country is changing fast. It is becoming more diverse. More urban. Much busier. New forms of farming, carbon emissions, the sprawl of housing, new technology and social shifts have changed the relationship between people and the countryside, and left nature and our climate in crisis.

The way we protect and improve our landscapes needs to change radically to respond to this. If their natural beauty is to be in a better condition 70 years from today, even better to look at, far more biodiverse, and alive with people from all backgrounds and parts of the country, they cannot carry on as they do now.

We need to reignite the fire and vision which brought this system into being in 1949. We need our finest landscapes to be places of natural beauty which look up and outwards to the nation they serve. In essence, we've asked not 'what do national landscapes need?', but 'what does the nation need from them today?'

Glover reviewed the structure of our protected landscapes and put forward several recommendations including reviewing governance structures, strengthening

management plans, prioritising nature recovery, renaming AONBs as National Landscapes and expanding their statutory purposes.

In 2024, following Glover's recommendation, England's AONBs were re-named as National Landscapes to better reflect their important role (alongside National Parks) in achieving the nation's strategic goals related to health, wellbeing, sustainable rural tourism, public access, climate change, and nature recovery.

1.3 The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (2023)

The statutory purpose of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty remains to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the designated landscape. In addition, several existing nature conservation designation, such as Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, and Sites of Special Scientific Interest, along with National Nature Reserves, all interact with protected landscape designations to help safeguard and preserve the countryside. This aligns with the government's commitment to protect 30% of the country's land and water for biodiversity by 2030 (the 30 by 30 target), a long-term goal established under the Environment Act 2021.

In December 2023, the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) imposed a legal duty on relevant authorities to actively "seek to further the purpose" of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of National Landscapes. As a result, all public bodies are now required to carefully consider the implications of proposals (including transport and planning) on the National Landscape. The new duty stresses the importance of avoiding harm to the statutory purpose of National Landscapes and requires a proactive approach to explore how best to achieve the statutory purpose, particularly by considering the policy framework set out in Part 4 of this Management Plan.

1.4 The Vision for National Landscapes

In 2022, the Government response to Glover setting out the following vision for National Parks and National Landscapes as:

'A coherent national network of beautiful, nature-rich spaces that all parts of society can easily access and enjoy. Protected landscapes will support thriving local communities and economies, improve our public health and wellbeing, drive forward nature recovery, and build our resilience to climate change.'

Each National Landscape has a Management Plan which is a statutory document guiding how the landscape should:

- Conserve and enhance the character and special qualities identified in the plan
- Support the objectives, policies, and principles set out in the plan
- Implement the actions and recommendations detailed within the plan

1.5 Core Principles

This Management Plan looks beyond the next five or ten years and sets out a long-term vision for the Surrey Hills as a thriving National Landscape for the next century. It is based on the following principles that guide the priorities and actions, ensuring a thriving, sustainable future for the Surrey Hills as a National Landscape:

- **Conserve and Enhance:** Go beyond preservation by actively improving the landscape, architecture, and natural history for future generations.
- **Deliver Wider Benefits:** While focusing on conservation, contribute to broader goals like health, wellbeing, and social inclusion.
- **Foster Sustainability:** Build a sustainable land management model and rural economy to support local communities and the landscape's future.
- **Build Resilience:** Learn from the past to adapt to future challenges with nature-based solutions and modern technologies.
- **Think Bigger:** Expand and connect protected nature sites, improve biodiversity, and use land creatively to address issues like flooding.
- **Balance Access and Protection:** Prioritise conservation when conflicts arise between public enjoyment and environmental preservation, following the Sandford Principle

1.6 Management Plan Preparation

The 75th anniversary of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act in 2024 inspired this Management Plan. It offered an opportunity to reflect on how the landscape has been conserved and enhanced over the past seventy-five years and to outline the vision, principles, and priorities for the rest of the 21st Century.

In May 2024, Julian Glover, Chair of the 2019 Designated Landscapes Review, launched the "Postcards from the Future" campaign. This initiative invited the public to describe how they envision the Surrey Hills as a thriving place for both people and nature by the year 2100, in the context of a changing climate. Over two hundred submissions were analysed and processed using AI to help create vision statements and identify the strategic priorities for achieving that vision. These were then further appraised through a public survey in September 2024, which received over a thousand responses. The vision statements and priorities were explored in a series of workshops with landowners, farmers, partner organisations, and local authority planning officers. The results of this extensive process have directly informed the contents of this Management Plan.

The Surrey Hills Symposium, entitled Nature Calling, held at Surrey University and attended by 300 people in November 2024, provided another opportunity to develop the

75-year vision for the Surrey Hills as a thriving place for people and nature. Contributions from speakers, panellists, and guests helped define their respective visions, identify barriers, and suggest priority actions. The performance artist Rosie May recited her poem, *The Year Twenty-One Hundred*, based on her reflections on the "Postcards" campaign.

This Management Plan follows the interim guidance prepared by Natural England and uses the targets and outcome themes developed in DEFRA guidance. It sets out the priorities and policies through which we will fulfil the statutory duties and guide relevant authorities and decision-makers in fulfilling their duty to "seek to further" the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the National Landscape.

1.7 Strategic Environmental Assessment

The strategic environmental assessment (SEA) is a requirement set out in the Environmental Assessment of Plans & Programmes Regulations 2004 (Statutory Instrument 2004 No.1633). It explains how the likely significant environmental impacts of the Management Plan policies have been identified and how that information will inform the Plan. A full copy of the report and the non-technical summary will be available on the Surrey Hills website portal.