

MINUTES of the SURREY HILLS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY (NATIONAL LANDSCAPE) BOARD (SURREY HILLS BOARD) held at 1:30pm on 5 March 2025 at Council Chamber, Woodhatch Place, 11 Cockshot Hill, Woodhatch, Reigate RH2 8EF.

MEMBERS PRESENT = *

Independent Chair Kathy Atkinson*	
<u>Core Members</u> Councillor Catherine Young* Guildford Borough Council Councillor Claire Malcomson* Mole Valley District Council Councillor Nadean Moses Reigate and Banstead Borough Council Councillor Catherine Sayer* Tandridge District Council Councillor Ruth Reed* Waverley Borough Council Councillor Marisa Heath* Surrey County Council Stephen Rudd* Natural England Stephanie Fudge The National Trust	<u>Delivery Partners</u> Michael Coughlin Surrey Hills Enterprises Community Interest Company Gordon Jackson* Surrey Hills Society and Surrey Hills Trust Fund <u>Advisory Members</u> Mike Waite* Surrey Wildlife Trust Harriet Henrick* National Farmers Union John Goodridge Campaign to Protect Rural England Tim Bamford Country Land and Business Association Deborah Sherry* Surrey Association of Local Councils <u>Observer</u> Alison Clarke Surrey Hills Arts

1. CHAIR'S WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair welcomed the Board and observers to the meeting.

The Chair made the following announcements:

- The Chair thanked everyone involved in the management plan and governance review, highlighting the significant effort required for these tasks.
- The Chair mentioned the consultation timetable for the management plan, noting that the consultation draft would be going out this month.
- The Chair discussed the impact of devolution on governance and funding, mentioning that Defra was cutting National Park revenue funds by 7%.
- The Chair emphasised the importance of partnerships to deliver value for money on capital spending, mentioning targets like 30 by 30 and access for all.

- The Chair expressed concerns about the long-term viability of farming and the lack of government plans for inheritance tax on agricultural land.
- The Chair welcomed the extension of the Farming in Protected Landscapes funding.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Stephanie Fudge (National Trust) and Michael Coughlin (Surrey Hills Enterprises Community Interest Company)

James Nicholson acted as a substitute for Stephanie Fudge.

Maggie Howell acted as a substitute for Michael Coughlin

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2024 were approved, subject to a spelling correction to reflect the correct name of Cllr Claire Malcomson in the list of attendees.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

One public question was received by the deadline. The questions and response are attached to these minutes as Appendix 1.

The Chair stated that Gareth Jex submitted a question on behalf of the responsible off-road members of the Surrey Countryside Access Forum, raising concerns about the impact of dirt bike activity on Hindhead Commons, Devils Punchbowl and the surrounding Surrey Hills countryside.

A video was presented to illustrate the environmental damage being caused by these activities and to highlight how some are being misleadingly promoted as legal trails.

The Chair highlight the response to the question, outlining the actions taken, including writing to Surrey Police to request investigation and enforcement, and efforts to have the video removed from YouTube.

James Nicholson, National Trust, confirmed that the organisation was aware of the issue and was actively working with the police and members of the public to address the problem.

6. NATURAL ENGLAND AONB BOUNDARY EXTENSION UPDATE

Stephen Rudd from Natural England provided a presentation to the Board, during which the following points were raised:

- a. The second consultation for the Surrey Hills Boundary Review ran from September to December 2024, and officers are currently analysing the results.
- b. The analysis report was expected to be published in May, with the next step being to get Natural England board approval for going to the notice period.

- c. The goal was to complete this process within the current calendar year and submit the final proposal to the Secretary of State next year.
 - d. The second consultation received over 370 responses, with more than 80% in favour of the proposed additions, including areas in East Hampshire. 4 5
 - e. The proposed boundary extension would increase the Surrey Hills AONB by 130 square kilometres, a 30% increase.
 - f. The consultation responses showed strong support for the proposed additions, with the highest number of responses for areas like Limpsfield, Beddlestead Valley, and Walddingham.
 - g. There were also some proposed deletions, with the highest number of responses concerning the Dunsfold area.
1. The Chair thanked the representative from Natural England for their presentation and invited the Board to ask any questions or provide feedback.
 2. A member of the Board asked if there had been any feedback from the government regarding their stance on the review. The representative from Natural England responded that it was still too early to know, as there was a lot of ongoing activity. They indicated that it would take approximately six to twelve months to gain a clearer understanding.
 3. A member of the Board raised concerns about the increased housing requirements for local authorities and the importance of the national landscape as an added level of protection. They requested that the presentation slides be shared with the Board, so they could be distributed to local parish councils. The representative from Natural England agreed to share the slides with the Board.
 4. A member of the Board inquired about the reasons for the proposed deletions and whether these areas were targeted for development. The representative from Natural England explained that the deletions were based on evidence and that the process was evidence-led. They clarified that if planning permission were granted for development in any area, that area would be excluded from the proposed boundary.

Resolved:

The Board noted the update.

7. SURREY HILLS MANAGEMENT PLAN

Rob Fairbanks, Director – Surrey Hills National Landscape, introduced the management plan item with the following key points:

- a. The management plan was a legal duty for local authorities to keep under review and adopt every five years. The current plan covers 2020-2025, and the new plan aims to launch this year.
- b. The plan was divided into five parts, each designed to be read individually, which may result in some duplication.
- c. The first part included an introduction to national landscapes, highlighting the 75th anniversary of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, the Glover review, and the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act. It also covers the national Defra vision and core principles.

- d. The second part described the special qualities of the Surrey Hills, including its extent, historic environment, statement of significance, and defining special qualities.
 - e. The third part outlined the vision for the Surrey Hills, based on three themes: thriving plants and animals, enhancing beauty and heritage, and engagement in mitigating climate change. It included a 75-year vision, long-term targets, and strategic priorities.
 - f. The fourth part outlined the policy framework, demonstrating how responsible bodies can meet their duty to further the purpose of the designation.
 - g. The fifth part discusses the role of the National Landscapes Partnership, including the Surrey Hills Board, brands, partners, team, business planning, and the monitoring and review of the plan.
 - h. The plan was set to launch the consultation draft on 25 March 2025 at the Surrey Nature Partnerships Planning and Biodiversity Conference. A web platform would be available for public comment, and a SurveyMonkey would be used to gather feedback on the policy framework. The aim was to have the plan adopted by local authorities in July and officially launched in September 2025.
2. The Chair emphasised that the consultation on the management plan would be genuine, with the aim of engaging properly with partners to ensure their buy-in for the plan's delivery. The Chair noted that the deadline for feedback from Board members was set for 12 March 2025, to assist in shaping the consultation draft. The Chair proposed delegating the sign-off of the consultation draft to Ian Dunsford and herself, to ensure its timely publication on the 25 March 2025. The Chair also acknowledged the challenge of setting targets for 75 years and five years, aiming for a balance between ambition and realism, and thanked Sally Blake for her efforts in gathering data on Sites of Special Scientific Interest conditions.
 3. A member of the Board raised the importance of including wider partners, such as farmers and businesses, in the plan to support regenerative farming and biodiversity. The Chair agreed and emphasised the need to engage with stakeholders during the consultation.
 4. A member of the Board expressed concerns about the wording in policy P5, particularly the last sentence regarding compensatory measures for residual harm. The member suggested deleting it as it lacks legal support and could encourage harmful development. The AONB Planning Advisor responded to the concerns about Policy P5 by acknowledging the points raised. He agreed with her suggestion to modify the wording of the policy to ensure it aligns with national policy and avoids the implication that compensatory measures could justify harm to the landscape. The AONB Planning Advisor proposed an alternative wording for Policy P5, which the member found acceptable. The revised wording read "Development that will fail to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the national landscape will be resisted even where well screened in line with national policy and the LIRA 2023. Where overriding exceptional circumstances clearly exist, the impact should be mitigated with the aim of there being no residual harm".
 5. A member of the Board suggested setting a target for biodiversity net gain, proposing 20% as a stronger target than the government's 10%. The Director acknowledged the

importance of setting ambitious targets and mentioned the need to balance them with realistic goals.

6. The Chair invited members to review the management plan, particularly Section 4, and to suggest any improvements to the policy wording where necessary. Members were also asked to provide their views on the proposed targets, both in relation to the 75-year vision and the five-year steps towards achieving that vision. In addition, members were encouraged to suggest any specific organisations or groups that should be engaged during the formal consultation period, in order to ensure the widest and most effective buy-in for the delivery of the plan.
7. A member of the Board recommended having an overarching policy to ensure all policies are considered together rather than individually. The Director confirmed that this suggestion would be taken into account.

Resolved:

The Board noted the report.

8. SURREY HILLS GOVERNANCE REVIEW

1. A representative from Resources for Change introduced the governance review and outlined its scope and purpose. This included reviewing the existing Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) constitution and considering broader governance issues in light of upcoming changes such as devolution and the boundary review. The following points were raised:
 - a. The representative described the research and engagement activities undertaken, including desk-based research, an online survey with Board members, and structured discussions with key stakeholders.
 - b. Key findings were highlighted, including the complexity of the current governance structure, a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities, and the need to strengthen decision-making and resource management.
 - c. Five governance models were presented. The Executive Management Board was recommended as the preferred option due to its potential to improve decision-making, reduce bureaucracy, and enable greater specialist engagement.
 - d. Governance principles were discussed, including enthusiasm, commitment, a focus on outcomes, and inclusivity. A proposed structure was outlined, consisting of an Executive Management Board, strategy groups aligned with Defra outcomes, and a partnership forum to support wider engagement.
 - e. The importance of scrutiny was emphasised, with suggestions including oversight by Defra or a finance subgroup. The need to seek legal advice from Surrey County Council to ensure compliance was also noted.
2. The Chair raised a query about the relationship between the Executive Management Board and the strategy groups, particularly in relation to decision-making on resources.
3. The Chair questioned whether the proposed governance model should be future-proof in light of upcoming changes such as devolution.

4. The Chair suggested appointing advocates for the three themes (climate, nature, people and place).
5. The Chair raised the issue of scrutiny and whether it should be external or managed internally by the Executive Management Board. The Board stated that scrutiny could be managed internally, with the Executive Management Board ensuring transparency and accountability.
6. A member of the Board emphasised the need for a detailed strategy aligned with the management plan and suggested that the Executive Management Board should have overall responsibility for this.
7. The Board noted a comment that scrutiny should be conducted at the local level and not necessarily rely on Defra. A member of the Board highlighted the importance of ensuring that the strategy was integrated into the plans of other organisations to avoid duplication and unnecessary meetings.
8. A member suggested that delivery should be mainstreamed through existing frameworks such as the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).
9. A member of the Board emphasised the need for Board members to include subject matter experts who can champion its objectives and ensure effective delivery through partner organisations.
10. A Board Member stressed the importance of identifying success measures and maintaining the Board's influence, especially given the anticipated changes in government structures.
11. A member of the Board raised concerns about the Board's capacity to deal with planning matters, particularly in the context of a potential increase in the size of the Surrey Hills area.
12. The Board Members confirmed that their preferred governance model was the Executive Management Board.
13. Following discussion, It was noted that the representative from Natural England would reconvene the steering group to further refine the governance model, taking into account the feedback received during the meeting.
14. The Director informed the Board that discussions had taken place with the National Heritage Lottery Fund and Julian Glover OBE regarding a £150 million fund intended to support the organisational capacity of national landscapes. He explained that the aim was to secure additional resources to strengthen partnerships with the Surrey Hills Society, Surrey Hills Enterprises, and the Community Foundation for Surrey. The Director emphasised the importance of developing an expression of interest in order to access this funding and enhance the capacity to deliver on strategic objectives.

Resolved:

The Board noted the report.

9. SURREY HILLS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE FORWARD PLAN

1. The Director introduced the Management Plan Monitoring Report highlighting that the report was presented every quarter to the board,. The Director emphasised that the report looked back at past achievements and forward to future plans, ensuring that the strategic pillars are consistently monitored and updated
2. The AONB Planning Advisor discussed the implications of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, emphasising the need for local planning authorities to understand

and apply the new provisions to avoid legal challenges. He mentioned the importance of proportionate application in both planning applications and local plans. The Advisor also addressed the proposed second runway at Gatwick, highlighting concerns about increased noise pollution and its impact on the Surrey Hills. He suggested collaboration with other protected landscapes to address these issues.

3. The Surrey Hills Programme Manager provided updates on the Access Fund, mentioning the allocation of £230,000 to various projects, including those with the National Trust and Countryside Regeneration Trust. She discussed the continuation of the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) program, despite initial instructions to wind it down. The programme manager highlighted the strategic focus on issues like deer management, aiming to address broader landscape issues with partners.
4. The representative from the Surrey Hills Society and Surrey Hills Trust Fund reported on the success of the conservation volunteer program, including the planting of 51,000 trees and engagement with various community groups. He mentioned the Growing Together Project and the Carefarm initiative, highlighting the positive impact on local communities. The representative also noted the transition of staff and the need for a more structured solution to ensure sustainability.
5. The representative from Surrey Hills Arts updated on the Nature Calling project, including the launch of the Nature's Anthem and workshops with schools and elders. She mentioned upcoming events and the focus on maintaining existing artworks. The representative also discussed the unsuccessful Arts Council bid and the development of smaller projects.
6. The representative from the Surrey Hills Enterprises Community Interest Company reported on the website's accessibility improvements, membership growth, and the consolidation of events. She highlighted the success of events in promoting local businesses and the community, despite challenges in staffing.
7. The representative from Natural England announced the creation of a Super National Nature Reserve, covering 3,500 hectares and involving multiple partners. He emphasised the importance of this initiative for nature protection and the opportunities for funding and collaboration. The Director mentioned upcoming events, including the World War II memorial event and the National Landscapes Association conference.
8. A Member of the Board highlighted a pressing issue of small abattoir closures in Farnborough and other nearby areas, which poses a significant threat to the infrastructure supporting regenerative and pasture-fed farming models. She emphasised that the closure of these facilities forces farmers to transport their animals over long distances, making the farming model unviable due to increased costs and logistical challenges. The Board noted that issues and, following this, the Chair encouraged the Board Member initiate the work and collaborate with relevant stakeholders to investigate the impacts and take collective action.

Resolved:

The Board noted the report.

10. MEETING DATE

The Board noted the date of the next meeting.

The meeting closed at: 4:00

Kathy Atkinson
Independent Chair