**Joint Advisory Committee for the Surrey Hills National Landscape**

25th June 2025

####  **PROCEDURAL MATTERS – PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

1. **Public Question submitted by John Oliver**

The ‘Surrey Hills National Landscape Governance Review’ by Resources for Change, makes these two statements about the periodicity of Management Plans;

• Para 2.1 “National Landscapes are funding [presumably “funded”] by Defra (75%) and Local Authorities (25%) to develop and deliver five-year Management Plans for the area

• Para 2.1.1 “Every National Landscape must have a Management Plan agreed and published by the relevant Local Authority (the Accountable Body), which is reviewed every five years”.

In addition, it refers readers to the Natural England guidance for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The Resources for Change report implies that funding is conditional upon a 5-year Management Plan being agreed (as opposed to any other length of time) and that the Plan is reviewed every five years, but only at the 5-year point.

However:

• the requirement is that Plans should be reviewed ‘at least every five years’. More frequent reviews are entirely within the requirements of the legislation. Plans can be reviewed annually, every three years etc. Plans do not have to be for five years.

• the Natural England guidance states, “The plan should include:…… a strategy, such as a 5 year plan, of how you’ll manage change”. This does not state that it should be limited to a 5-year plan.

This would indicate that Resources for Change has ‘got the wrong end of the stick’ regarding the period which a Plan can cover and the legal requirement for a review to take place at least every five years.

In the light of Resources for Change’s statements, could you please give a detailed explanation of:

• the criteria which Natural England uses to allocate the 75% basic funding amount to the Surrey Hills area of outstanding natural beauty;

• whether this is conditional upon a 5-year (as opposed to a Plan of any other timescale) Management Plan being in place

• whether, if it is conditional upon a 5-year Management Plan being in place, this means that no funding has been allocated for the current 5-year period as no Management Plan is in place, given that the previous Plan has expired and the latest Plan has not yet been agreed?

• If funding has been allocated for the current year, on what basis has this been agreed.

Kind regards

John Oliver

**Reply:**

Dear John

Thank you for your Public Question. I am responding to your 4 points in order:

It is Defra, not Natural England, that provides the core funding to both National Park Authorities and National Landscape partnerships. Natural England is not involved in this process at a local level. The Glover Review called for a doubling of core funding for National Landscapes and a transparent funding formula. This has not been actioned by Defra.

Defra requires an adopted Management Plan to be submitted to the Secretary of State no less than every 5-years. Local planning authorities are required to keep the Management Plan under review with an expectation that they will contribute 25% towards the core cost of a local National Landscape partnership.

The current Surrey Hills Management Plan is dated (2020 – 2025) which Defra understands to mean it expires on 31st December 2025. The process for agreeing the new Management Plan for 2025 – 2030 is being considered at the Surrey Hills National Landscape Board meeting.

Defra has offered a grant towards the core cost for the Surrey Hills National Landscape for 2025 – 2026 financial year. As part of the grant award, there is an expectation that the team will deliver a programme of Defra capital funding for Farming in Protected Landscapes, Access for All, progress towards 30x30 and projects which deliver innovation, investing-to-save and income-generation. These capital programmes will need to be delivered by a small team on top of the core work which Defra defines as:

 a) Developing, reviewing, preparing and publishing the National Landscape vision and the CRoW Act Management Plan

 b) Promoting the National Landscape vision and Management Plan to help distinguish the National Landscape from adjacent countryside

 c) Advising upon, facilitating and co-ordinating implementation by others of the Management Plan

 d) Advising Local Authorities on their activities within National Landscapes to encourage them to go beyond normal levels of service (attain the highest possible standards) in countryside management

 e) Monitoring and reporting on progress against Management Plan targets

 f) Providing landscape related planning advice and monitoring landscape condition

 g) Accessing resources for management activities

 h) Working with and contributing to the National Landscape Association activities, sharing advice and best practice nationally and regionally.

 i) Providing a management role to co-ordinate National Landscape protection through the actions of the National Landscape unit, the Partnership and other partners at a local and strategic level.

 j) Developing an involvement by the community in the management of the National Landscape

National Parks authorities and the National Landscapes Association are advocating to provide at least a 3-year commitment to funding through the comprehensive spending review. The budgets and the priorities of the Surrey Hills National Landscape team will be set out in a draft business plan which will be presented to the next Board meeting.

Your sincerely

**Kathy Atkinson**

**Independent Chair, Surrey Hills National Landscape Board**

**23 June 2025**