

**MINUTES of the SURREY HILLS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
(NATIONAL LANDSCAPE) BOARD (SURREY HILLS BOARD)** held at 1:30pm on 17
September 2025 at Leith Hill Place, Leith Hill Ln, Dorking RH5 6LY

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 Polly Lawman* National Farmers Union Ramsey Nagaty* Campaign to Protect Rural England Lucy Charman* 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, Kathy Atkinson, welcomed Members and observers to the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.

The Chair made the following announcements:

- Since the last meeting in June, the Wealden Heath National Nature Reserve was launched.
- The Local Nature Recovery Strategy remained out for consultation; Members were encouraged to respond.
- Surrey Hills co-hosted the National Landscapes Conference in Winchester, including two successful field trips showcasing heathland and downland sites.

- Summer events included Surrey Hills Arts' Nature Calling project and Surrey Hills Enterprises' Country Fair and Wood Fair.
 - A new Secretary of State for Defra, Emma Reynolds, had been appointed.
 - This meeting served as the Annual General Meeting (AGM).
 - Governance structure changes were not yet finalised; an additional meeting was likely in December.
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2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2025 were approved.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

One public question was received by the deadline from Sally Blake. The question and response are attached as Annex 1 to these minutes. There was no supplementary question.

6. NATURAL ENGLAND – AONB BOUNDARY EXTENSION UPDATE

Introduction provided by Stephen Rudd (Natural England).

1. Stephen Rudd (Natural England) gave a comprehensive update on the Surrey Hills Boundary Extension Project. He outlined the historical context, the designation process, governance improvements, and consultation results showing strong support for the extension. The proposed increase was 130 sq km (30.5%). He explained that designation was not a barrier to development but added weight in planning decisions. Next steps included Natural England Board approval, a 28-day notice period, and submission to Defra with a decision expected in early 2026.
2. A Member asked how objections would be handled during the notice period. Stephen confirmed all representations would be reviewed and summarised for Defra.
3. A Member queried the implications for Green Belt and "grey belt". Stephen clarified grey belt was not a consideration for natural beauty and reiterated the overlap with Green Belt policy.
4. A Member raised concerns about solar farm exclusions. Stephen confirmed areas could be reconsidered if permissions lapsed.

5. A Member asked about the timeline for the Secretary of State's decision. Stephen stated that submission to Defra was expected early 2026, with a decision following thereafter which could not be determined.
6. A Member queried whether designation would block housing development. Stephen explained it would not block development but would add weight to protection in planning decisions.
7. A Member asked about resource needs for managing the expanded area. Stephen noted additional staffing support would need to be sought.
8. A Member requested copies of the presentation slides for local distribution. Stephen agreed to share them.

Resolved:

The Board noted the update.

7. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE, FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT PLAN REPORT (AGM)

Rob Fairbanks, Surrey Hills National Landscape Director, introduced the item.

1. Rob Fairbanks presented the Annual Governance, Finance and Management Plan Report. He outlined the risk register, the financial outturns and estimates, and reported on DEFRA funding. He highlighted Management Plan monitoring, planning responses, conservation projects, and Farming in Protected Landscapes delivery.
2. A Member asked about local authority contributions. Rob confirmed that this has been raised with Officers to align with the commitments in the constitution to match Defra core funding and stressed the importance of early invoicing.
3. Another Member queried changes to the risk register. Rob outlined new risks linked to governance transition and funding uncertainties.
4. A Member asked whether any firm commitments had been received from district councils. Rob confirmed none had been secured yet.
5. A Member queried the impact of funding formula changes on smaller authorities. Rob explained the formula was based on the designated area which would change with an extended area.
6. A Member thanked officers for planning support and ranger service delivery.

Resolved:

1. Note the Outturn Reports for 2023/24 and 2024/25 (Annex 1), the Estimates for 2025/26 and for 2026/27 (Annex 2).
2. Note the Governance Review proposals, subject to Surrey County Council Legal advice.
3. Note the scoring and sign off for the Access for All Programme (Annex 4).
4. Note the proposed investment for the Defra Capital Uplift Programme (Annex 5).
5. Approve the Risk Register (Annex 6) and note the actions arising.
6. Note and advise on the Surrey Hills Management Plan (2020 – 2025) Monitoring Framework.

7. Note the progress with the adoption and launch of the new Management Plan (2025 – 2030) – A 75 Year Vision for a Thriving National Landscape for People, Nature and the Climate.

8. NEW SURREY HILLS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP BOARD CONSTITUTION

Carolyn McKenzie, Director – Environment and Planning (SCC) introduced the item.

1. Carolyn McKenzie introduced the item and provided an overview of the proposed governance changes. She explained that the new structure would include a Partnership Board responsible for strategic direction and policy, and an Operational Delivery Group focused on implementation. The intention was to streamline decision-making, ensure statutory compliance, and improve transparency and accountability. Carolyn noted that legal advice from Surrey County Council would be sought to confirm compliance and that the proposals were based on recommendations from the earlier governance review.
2. A Member asked why voting rights were limited to local authorities. In response, Carolyn clarified that statutory responsibilities required local authority oversight and that delivery partners would have an advisory role rather than voting rights.
3. Another Member raised concerns about diversity and independence within the proposed structure to act in the interests of the Surrey Hills. In response, Carolyn agreed these points would be addressed in the revised terms of reference to ensure broader representation and inclusivity.
4. A Member suggested forming a steering group to refine the proposals before the next meeting. In response, Carolyn confirmed this approach and welcomed volunteers to join the group.
5. A Member asked about meeting frequency and public access. In response, Carolyn confirmed there would be at least two public meetings annually and quarterly operational meetings, with minutes published online for transparency.
6. A Member queried chairing arrangements for the delivery group. In response, Carolyn advised that the chair would rotate among local authorities to maintain fairness and shared responsibility.
7. The Chairman agreed that a steering group would meet to review and refine the governance proposals and report back at the December meeting.

Resolved:

1. The Board noted the governance proposals and agreed that a steering group would convene to consider further and refine details.

9. THE ACORN PROJECT – NHLF LANDSCAPE CONNECTIONS

Rob Fairbanks, Surrey Hills National Landscape Director, introduced early-stage plans for a potential £5–6m National Lottery Heritage Fund bid, focusing on nature recovery, heritage skills, and organisational resilience. Members of the Board then participated in a collaborative session where ideas and priorities were shared to help shape the bid.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Cllr Catherine Young raised concerns about coffee vans operating in Surrey Hills car parks and their impact on sensitive sites.

1. In response, it was noted that local authority licensing teams would need to be consulted to ensure compliance.
 2. Another Member suggested developing clear guidance for mobile vendors to protect sensitive landscapes and avoid congestion. Further to this, another Member proposed exploring designated areas for vendors to minimise environmental impact while supporting visitor needs.
 3. Members were asked to provide feedback and suggestions on managing mobile vendors effectively outside the meeting and send their ideas directly to Cllr Catherine Young.
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11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on **3 December 2025 at 1:30pm.**

Kathy Atkinson

Independent Chair