



Surrey Hills
National
Landscape

Surrey Hills National Landscape Board

Item 6 Governance Structure

Purpose of the report:

To recommend the new terms of reference for the Surrey Hills National Landscape Partnership Board

Recommendations:

Members are asked to

- 1) To agree the terms of reference
- 2) To advise on membership of the Partnership Board
- 3) To agree the recruitment of an Administrator as part of the core team, subject to business case

1. Introduction

1.1 In November 2024, the Surrey Hills Board commissioned Resources for Change to undertake a review of the Constitution. This was presented to the Surrey Hills Board in March 2025. The subsequent Surrey County Council Legal advice presented to the Board's AGM in September was that the governance model of a Joint Advisory Committee needed to be retained with the executive functions resting with the host (accountable and contracting) authority.

1.2 The new Management Plan refers to a Surrey Hills Partnership Board, as the Joint Advisory Committee, and a Steering Group, rather than an Executive Management Board as previously recommended by Resources for Change.

1.3 Draft Terms of Reference for the Partnership Board were discussed at an extended Governance Review Steering Group, chaired by Natural England on 4th November at Reigate Town Hall. The Terms of Reference were revised and Members provided further comment, which have been included in the Draft Terms of Reference at Annex 1. This includes an organogram and a schedule of meetings over the course of a year.

1.4 It is noted however that any new arrangements need to be flexible and kept under review with the impact of Local Government Reorganisation and the extension to the Surrey Hills National Landscape. Given the pressures on local authorities, the National Landscapes Association, at its AGM on 28th November, agreed to investigate with Defra whether the Association could act as a host authority for National Landscape Partnerships.

2. The Partnership Board

2.1 The Terms of Reference provide greater clarity that the Core members of the JAC have the voting rights as it needs to be local authority controlled. However, the benefit of the proposed new structure is to be a broader more representative Partnership of advisers, which it is proposed will meet twice a year, with the addition of an Annual Partnership Tour.

2.2 The Partnership Board meetings will be in public, such as with parish councils. The Spring meeting will consider the Annual Report and Business Plan, and the Autumn AGM meeting will include Core Members considering governance matters, agreeing Outturn reports and recommending core budgets from constituent authorities.

3. Steering Group

3.1 Proposed this should be a mix of officers and members of the core members and will include the Independent Chair. The main function is to advise on and review the delivery of the Management Plan and NL team Business Plan, finance and staffing. Meeting at least four times a year, the Group will advise and review the Partnership Board meetings. Membership will be flexible to ensure it has the resources and experience to focus on the Partnership Board's priorities, particularly around engaging land management advice. Given the impact of LGR on local authorities, it is proposed that the Surrey Association of Local Councils retains a standing place on the Group to ensure parish and town councils are better represented.

4. Working Groups

4.1 A lot of the delivery of the Management Plan is proposed through Working Groups to tackle issues and deliver programmes that require collaboration. The Surrey Hills Partnership Board will agree the establishment and the Chairing. They will generally be task specific and time limited, unless they are delivering a function such as the Farming in Protected Landscapes Panel.

5. National Landscape Team

5.1 The small core staff will be employed by the host authority and work to its financial rules and regulations. The proposed monthly team meetings will include the wider Surrey Hills family to ensure opportunities to collaborate are maximised and that there are consistent communications, which align with the Surrey Hills brand guidelines.

5.2 The Resources for Change report recommended that the team employs an Administrator [Executive Assistant] to provide the capacity to help organise meetings, bookings, take notes, publish and share outcomes of meetings, and provide a point of contact for Members.

Annex 1 – Draft Governance Structure

1. Introduction

1.1. This is the governance structure for the Surrey Hills National Landscape; it comprises the Terms of Reference for the Surrey Hills National Landscape Partnership Board and the functions of its constituent elements.

2. Background

2.1. The Surrey Hills National Landscape Partnership was established as the Surrey Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee on 13th October 2013, referred to as the Surrey Hills Board. The Board champions the National Landscape (designated as the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1958), providing a united voice to promote its care and management. By bringing together a wide range of interests the Board, through its dedicated team of staff and in collaboration with others, develops and reviews the National Landscape Management Plan and facilitates its delivery.

3. Partnership Board Structure

3.1. From December 2025, a new structure has been created for the designated Surrey Hills National Landscape which comprises the following groups:

- A Partnership Board of funding partners and other bodies with a major interest across the Surrey Hills and expertise to lead the management of the National Landscape.
- A Steering Group, reporting to the National Landscape Board, of senior representatives from the funding partners and Natural England, to provide strategic direction and support to the National Landscape team in delivering the Management Plan.
- A National Landscape Team to facilitate delivery of the Management Plan and to service the Partnership, including co-ordinating production, implementation and review of the Management Plan on behalf of the Partnership Board.
- A Planning Officers' Working Group comprising officers of the Core Members, which provides professional and technical advice on planning issues.
- Working Groups (of appropriate composition and finite duration) established as necessary by the Partnership to advise and facilitate action on specific issues as they arise.

3.2. The Surrey Hills National Landscape is an active member of the wider family of protected landscapes, working regionally, nationally and at a European level through its membership of and links with the National Landscapes Association.

4. The Surrey Hills National Landscape Partnership Board

4.1 The Surrey Hills Partnership Board is a Joint Advisory Committee which:

- Promotes and champions the vision and aims of the Surrey Hills National Landscape
- Raises awareness among the public and stakeholders of the special qualities of the area and its importance
- Enables the agreement of common policies and strategies to be implemented across the National Landscape
- Ensures implementation of the Management Plan by enabling and delivering direct action to conserve and enhance the National Landscape and its setting
- Promotes innovation, acting as a test bed for new ideas and approaches in delivering the Management Plan priorities
- Plays a lead role in championing the vision, policies and priorities in the National Landscape Management Plan
- Monitors and evaluates the delivery of the Surrey Hills National Landscape Management Plan
- Encourages and recruits wide political and financial investment in support of the purpose of the designation
- Encourages and develops community and business involvement in the management of the Surrey Hills National Landscape in line with the Management Plan
- Enables the exchange of information and ideas nationally, regionally and locally to further the purpose of the National Landscape

4.2 Membership of the Partnership Board includes representatives from local authorities, statutory agencies, regional bodies and landowner representatives. Each partner organisation is required to nominate one representative to regularly attend meetings, provide feedback and co-ordinate activities within their organisation as required. Support staff may also attend. Local authority representation will be by elected members appointed by the authority. Board membership may fluctuate over time but will include:

- Local authorities responsible for public services within any part of the Surrey Hills National Landscape

- Surrey Association of Local Councils
- Natural England
- Forestry Commission
- Environment Agency
- Surrey Wildlife Trust
- Surrey Nature Partnership
- National Trust
- National Farmers Union
- Country Land and Business Association
- CPRE Surrey
- Surrey Coalition of Disabled People
- Surrey Climate Change Commission
- Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum
- Surrey Hills Enterprises
- Surrey Hills Society
- Surrey Hills Arts Partnership Board

4.3 The Host authority which receives the Defra grant-in-aid and employs the National Landscape Team would normally be represented by the relevant Portfolio Holder.

4.4 Board members are expected to promote the purposes of National Landscape designation and the work of the National Landscape Partnership and Team within their organisation and sector.

4.5 Board members will be responsible for approving recommendations and proposals presented by the National Landscape team or the Steering Group. Decisions will normally be reached by agreement and, if necessary, conducted by a vote. For decisions relating to the funding of the National Landscape Team and other core costs only the core funding local authority and Natural England (on behalf of Defra) have the right to vote.

4.6 In addition, the Board can appoint individual Advocates to represent the main themes of the Management Plan: Nature; Climate; People and Place. These roles will be filled through an open recruitment process and will attract a modest allowance. The Advocates' role will be to ensure the Management Plan delivery addresses the priorities for each theme; they will be encouraged to constructively challenge the Partnership Board and may be invited to

chair Working Groups as appropriate. They will ensure links with relevant thematic programmes such as:

- Surrey Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- Surrey Countryside Access Forum
- Wealden Health National Nature Reserve

4.7 Board meetings are held in public. Observers may attend National Landscape Board meetings having given prior notice of their intention to attend. Observers will not be expected to participate in discussion although they may be invited to speak for up to three minutes at the discretion of the Chair.

4.8 Where an item on the agenda is of overriding importance to an organisation or individual not normally represented, they may be invited to attend for that item at the discretion of the Chair.

4.9 Members of the public may raise an issue with the Board if it cannot be dealt with by the National Landscape Team. The issue must be presented as a Public Question in writing and sent to the Chair at least 3 days before the date of the meeting. A written response will be made within two weeks of the meeting.

4.10 Board members must declare any financial or other interest prior to discussion of the relevant item by the Board.

4.11 With regard to press and publicity, only the Board Chair and, under the Chair's delegation, the National Landscape Director or any other person with the Chair's specific authorisation, can speak on behalf of the National Landscape (the Board).

4.12. The Board will meet at least two times a year with a Spring meeting to consider and agree the Business Plan and an Annual General Meeting in the Autumn to consider governance and finance matters. In addition, there will be an Annual Tour in the Summer for for the Surrey Hills Partnership Board for networking, to experience new areas of the AONB and to discuss priority issues relating to the work programme of the Board.

5. Steering Group

5.1. The Steering Group provides strategic direction and support to the National Landscape Partnership Board and National Landscape Team in establishing, monitoring and reviewing the delivery of the Management Plan. The Steering Group supports the Local Planning Authorities and other relevant partner organisations in fulfilling the statutory requirements set out in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and LURA 2023.

5.2. The role of the Steering Group is to:

- Ensure the development, adoption and regular review of the Management Plan by the National Landscape Board as required under the CROW Act 2000
- Consider, debate and recommend courses of action to ensure delivery of the Management Plan for the Surrey Hills National Landscape
- Keep under review the management structure, the activity of the Planning Officers' Working Group and of any other Working Groups (task and finish) to enable effective implementation of the Management Plan
- Develop the work plan for Board approval, scrutinise delivery against the agreed plan and report back to the Board on progress

5.3 Membership will be flexible to ensure it has the resources and experience to focus on the Partnership Board's priorities, particularly around engaging land management advice, and will include:

- Chair of the Partnership Board
- Host authority representative
- Local (unitary) authorities' member representative who would also represent their authorities on the Partnership Board
- Surrey Association of Local Councils
- Natural England representative
- National Landscape Director
- Chair of Planning Officers' Working Group

5.4. The Steering Group will appoint a Chair and should meet no less than four times a year and its meetings should be timed to plan for and review outcomes of Partnership Board meetings.

5.5 The Secretariat will be provided by the Surrey Hills National Landscape Team.

6. The Partnership Board Chair

6.1 The Board will have an Independent Chair appointed by Natural England after an open recruitment process on a three-year term, with a modest annual allowance, with an option to renew for a further term if there is consensus among the other Board members to renew the Chair's term.

6.2 If the Independent Chair is unable to fulfil their role (for example, chairing a Board meeting) they may nominate a deputy from within the Board membership to stand in for them. When acting in place of the chair, any deputy will be expected to represent the Partnership Board independently of the organisation they normally represent.

6.3 The Independent Chair can stand down, giving reasonable notice.

7. Planning Officers' Working Group

7.1 A Planning Officers' Working Group comprising officers of the local planning authorities will provide the Board with professional and technical advice related to planning.

7.2 The Chair of the Planning Officers' Working Group will be elected by the Planning Officers' Working Group.

7.3 The Planning Officers' Working Group will meet as and when necessary, as determined by the Surrey Hills Director and the Chair of the Working Group. The secretariat for the Working Group will be provided by the National Landscape Team.

7.4 The Working Group may also seek the advice of other organisations or individuals on specific aspects of the Board's work as considered appropriate.

7.5 The Chair of the Working Group will attend Steering Group and Partnership Board meetings to advise Members as required

8. Working Groups

8.1 As advised by the Steering Group, the Partnership Board may task time-limited Working Groups to provide advice or implement specific actions to deliver elements of the Management Plan.

8.2 Working Group Chairs will be drawn from the Surrey Hills Partnership Board. Membership of each Working Group will be at the discretion of the Working Group Chair and the National Landscape Director and may include other members of the Board as appropriate, as well as additional individuals with expertise in the issue under consideration.

8.3 The Chair of the Working Group will report back at regular intervals to the Surrey Hills Partnership Board and will represent the Board on the Working Group.

8.4 The Working Group will be expected to identify tasks to complete within a given period. Where necessary the Working Group will make recommendations to the Board and its partners.

9. The National Landscape Team

9.1. The National Landscape Team is employed to support the Partnership Board and enable fulfilment of its purposes and objectives. The team is an independent staff team and reports to the Board. Monthly team meetings will coordinate the work of the Surrey Hills Family (Surrey Hills Enterprises CIC, Surrey Hills Society and Surrey Hills Arts Partnership Board) to ensure effective collaboration and alignment to the delivery of the Management Plan.

9.2 The core functions of the team are:

- Developing, reviewing, preparing and publishing the National Landscape Management Plan
 - Providing landscape related planning advice on policy and development proposals
 - Advising upon, facilitating and co-ordinating implementation by the team and others of the Management Plan
 - Advising Local Authorities on their activities within the Surrey Hills National Landscape, to encourage them to go beyond normal levels of service (attain the highest possible standards) in countryside management
 - Monitoring and reporting on progress against National Landscape Management Plan targets
 - Helping to support the condition monitoring of the National Landscape
 - Accessing resources to deliver the Board's business plan and ensuring effective collaboration and alignment with the Surrey Hills brand values.
 - Working with and contributing to the National Landscape Association activities, sharing advice and best practice nationally and regionally
 - Developing involvement by local communities in the management of the National Landscape and delivery of the Management Plan
- . Co-ordinating the work of the Surrey Hills Family including the Surrey Hills Society, Surrey Hills Enterprises, Surrey Hills Arts and project staff.
Developing and protecting the Surrey Hills brand identity and trademark.

10. Finance

10.1 The funding requirement of the Partnership Board will form part of a five-year rolling Business Plan that will align with the Management Plan. The rolling Business Plan will be reviewed by the Partnership Board.

10.2 The contributions to 'core' costs will be made primarily by Defra and the local planning authorities in relation to their duty to publish and keep under review the statutory Management Plan. Other organisations may be asked from time to time to provide funding or assistance in kind.

10.3 The accounts of the Partnership Board will be administered by the Host Authority and operated under its financial regulations.

10.4 A budget will be prepared each year by the Steering Group and presented to the Partnership Board for approval alongside the annual Business Plan and in the

context of the 5-year Management Plan. The budget will make sufficient provision to cover:

- staffing costs of the Surrey Hills Director and any other staff employed (such costs to include salaries, travel and subsistence, training, redundancy and recruitment)
- office accommodation and associated expenses
- costs associated with publicising and promoting the work of the Board
- the costs of any other projects and activities to be undertaken during the year for which the Board's approval has been given.

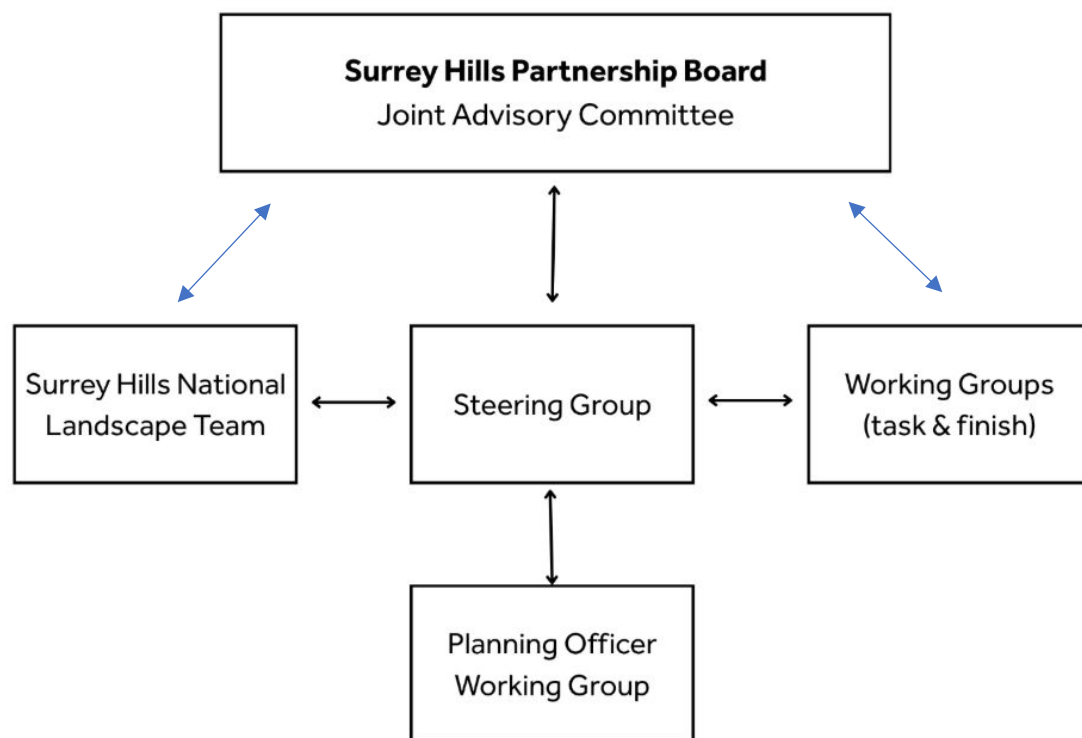
10.5 Financial contributions to the Board's budget will be agreed on an annual basis. Any surplus remaining in the Board's account at the end of a financial year shall be carried forward into the next financial year.

10.6 The Surrey Hills Director shall, within the budget limits agreed in advance and in accordance with the host authority's financial regulations or any conditions imposed by grant-giving bodies, be authorised to approve expenditure within the Board's terms of reference and to apply for grants, sponsorship, lottery funding or any other source of income. Continuing efforts will be made by all Members of the Board to identify and secure funding from a wide range of sources.

10.7 The Host authority will prepare an annual statement of accounts for the previous financial year for the Board's approval at its Annual General Meeting. The Surrey Hills Director will also be responsible for providing financial information in response to any reasonable request from any of the constituent local authorities or other Board members making a financial contribution.

10.8 The funding arrangements will be reviewed annually and the constitution for the Surrey Hills Board will be reviewed at least every 5 years at the time the Management Plan is reviewed and adopted

1. Organogram



2. Surrey Hills Partnership Board – Annual Governance Programme

Body	Purpose	Occurrence	Membership
Surrey Hills Partnership Board	Formal governance body responsible for overall direction and accountability	Twice Yearly March - Business Plan September - AGM	Board members and partner organisations
Steering Group	Strategic oversight, monitoring delivery of NL Management Plan, and advising the Partnership Board	Quarterly	Chair, key partners, local authorities, and Natural England representatives

Planning Officers Working Group (POWG)	Coordination on planning matters, policies, and development management	Quarterly	Local authority planning officers and Surrey Hills officers
National Landscape Team meetings	Operational coordination and project delivery updates	Monthly	Core Surrey Hills NL staff, Society, Enterprises, Arts and project leads
Annual Tour	On-site visit for Board and partners to review project delivery and local initiatives	Annual (June)	Partnership Board