
SURREY HILLS PARTNERSHIP MEETING

Date: 19 May 2026 Time: 13:30

Location: Pippbrook House, Dorking

MEMBERS' PRESENT*

<p>Kathy Atkinson * INDEPENDENT CHAIR</p> <p>Councillor Catherine Young* Guildford Borough Council</p> <p>Councillor Claire Malcomson* Mole Valley District Council</p> <p>Councillor Nadean Moses Reigate and Banstead Borough Council</p> <p>Councillor Catherine Sayer* Tandridge District Council</p> <p>Councillor Ruth Reed * Waverley Borough Council</p> <p>Councillor Marisa Heath* Surrey County Council</p> <p>Carolyn McKenzie * Surrey County Council</p> <p>Stephen Rudd Natural England</p> <p>Stephanie Fudge* The National Trust</p> <p>Mike Waite* Surrey Wildlife Trust</p> <p>Lisa Creaye-Griffin* Surrey Nature Partnership</p> <p>Professor Richard Murphy* Surrey Nature Partnership</p> <p>Tom Peters National Farmers Union</p> <p>Deborah Sherry* Surrey Association of Local Councils</p>	<p>Maggie Howell * Surrey Hills Enterprises Community Interest Company</p> <p>Michael Coughlin* Surrey Hills Enterprises Community Interest Company</p> <p>Gordon Jackson * Surrey Hills Society and Surrey Hills Trust Fund</p> <p>Matthew Woodcock* Forestry Commission</p> <p>Elliot Caines* Surrey Countryside Access Forum</p> <p>Dr Anna Sassin* Surrey Archaeological Society</p> <p>John Goodridge Campaign to Protect Rural England</p> <p>Lucy Charman * Country Land and Business Association</p> <p>Jo Bradshaw Surrey Hills Arts Partnership</p> <p>STAFF</p> <p>Clive Smith Surrey Hills NL Planning Advisor</p> <p>Rob Fairbanks Surrey Hills NL Director</p> <p>Louise Jackson Surrey Hills NL Comms Lead</p> <p>Adam Brown Nature Recovery Lead, Surrey County Council</p> <p>OBSERVER: Sally Blake</p>
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1. CHAIR'S WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair welcomed Members and noted that this was the first meeting under the revised governance structure, with a broader Partnership Board membership following the Governance Review.

It was confirmed that:

- The Board would now meet a minimum of twice per year, with additional meetings scheduled if required.
- A Steering Group has been established and has already met twice, focusing on the business plan and planning pressures.

The Chair highlighted several contextual issues:

- Continued geopolitical uncertainty and its implications for climate and the demand on natural resource.
- Potential impacts of national political change on protected landscapes.
- Ongoing Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), with transitional arrangements resulting in future changes to representation.

Updates were provided on:

- **Defra funding:** an indicative three-year settlement providing stability for staffing and the ability to plan investment with partners.
- **Staffing:** recent changes including recruitment to key roles and the need for an administrator. The Board welcomed new Comms Lead, Louise Jackson.
- **Planning pressures:** increasing importance of prioritising planning capacity and attendance at inquiries, as written submissions without attendance may carry less weight.

The Partnership discussed the new governance arrangements. It was noted that:

- The **Partnership** will focus on strategic leadership, convening and oversight.
- The **Steering Group** will provide scrutiny, delivery coordination, and support for officers.

Discussion points included:

- The importance of maintaining flexibility during LGR and boundary changes.
- The need for strong leadership and clarity on roles between the Board and Steering Group.
- The expectation that Members will contribute beyond formal meetings, including through task-and-finish groups. This will need to be resourced with an Administrator

Members emphasised:

- The importance of ensuring effective engagement despite a larger and more diverse Partnership.
 - The need for continued collaboration across sectors and partners.
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2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Nadean Moses (Reigate & Banstead BC), Stephen Rudd (Natural England), John Goodman (CPRE) and the National Farmers Union.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2025 were approved as an accurate record.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

One public question was received concerning traffic management, and highway works in Compton Village.

Members noted:

- General tensions between highway improvements and maintaining rural and historic character of villages

It was agreed that:

- Officers would continue discussions with Highways colleagues, and a follow-up response would be provided.
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6. BOUNDARY EXTENSION PROJECT

The Partnership received an update on the Surrey Hills boundary extension.

It was noted that:

- The proposal would increase the landscape by approximately 30%.
- Submission to the Secretary of State is expected in summer 2026.

Members discussed:

- Political uncertainty and potential risks to the process
- The importance of maintaining local authority and stakeholder support
- Possible approaches to advocacy and communication to encourage confirmation of the boundary.

Resolved:

The Board noted progress and will continue to support the extension process.

7. SURREY HILLS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE BUSINESS PLAN

The Director presented the Business Plan, aligned with the Management Plan's **75-year vision**.

The Partnership noted:

- Progress remains aligned with the Management Plan framework.
- Delivery is structured around three pillars:
 1. Nature recovery
 2. People, place and engagement
 3. Climate change

Key discussion points included:

- The reliance on partnership delivery, given that the National Landscape does not own or manage land directly.
- The importance of prioritisation within limited resources.
- The need to strengthen planning capacity in response to increasing development pressure.

The core team structure was confirmed as:

- Director
- Planning Advisor
- Communications Lead
- Administrator (proposed)

Other team staff are supported out of a mixture of core and project funding.

Updates were provided on delivery programmes across the partnership.

Key points:

- Ranger services continue to deliver significant impact through volunteer engagement, with over 500 volunteers contributing to conservation and community projects.
- Surrey Hills Enterprises reported strong engagement through events and business networks, helping to promote a sustainable rural economy.
- Collaboration remains central, with multiple partnerships supporting delivery across nature, access, and engagement.

Members noted:

- The scale and value of volunteer contributions

- The importance of community engagement in supporting landscape outcomes

The Partnership discussed the proposed NLHF Landscape Programme bid.

It was noted that:

- The programme could provide significant funding (~£5–6 million) over five years.
- Proposed focus areas include:
 - Woodland and treescape management
 - Skills development and training
 - Community engagement and access

Further points:

- The bid aligns with the Management Plan and Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Development funding will be sought to support preparation.
- A new **Surrey Hills Acorn (Nature) Fund** has been established as a ring-fenced funding mechanism to facilitate the NLHF grant and lever in other matching funds.

Discussion included:

- The need to define clear, measurable outcomes.
- The importance of strong partnerships and leveraging existing programmes.
- Opportunities for corporate and community contributions.

Resolved:

The Partnership supported progressing work to develop the Expression of Interest and associated funding proposals.

An update was provided on the Scotland Park housing proposal.

The Board noted:

- The appeal had ultimately been allowed following a second inquiry, despite earlier refusal.
- Concerns regarding consistency in Planning Inspectorate decisions.
- The increased weight given to “exceptional circumstances” in housing delivery.

Discussion highlighted:

- The risk of precedent-setting decisions increasing development pressure.
- Limitations in planning capacity impacting ability to attend inquiries.

Actions:

- Continue engagement with the Planning Inspectorate.
- Review internal prioritisation of planning resource and representation at inquiries.

8. MANAGEMENT PLAN MONITORING AND DELIVERY FRAMEWORK

A workshop session was held to begin mapping current and planned activity against Management Plan targets.

The Board noted:

- The need for a structured monitoring and evaluation framework
- Alignment with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- The importance of spatial mapping to identify gaps and opportunities

It was agreed that:

- A shared dataset would be developed mapping projects with the LNRS, identifying existing projects and planned projects.
 - Information would be refined and brought back to the Steering Group to identify priorities and gaps
 - This dataset would be considered at the next Partnership meeting.
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9. PARTNERSHIP TOUR

Members discussed emerging priorities to feature on the annual Partnership Tour.

Key themes included:

- Water management, including flood risk and river systems
- Nature recovery and habitat connectivity
- Climate resilience and carbon reduction

There was strong support for:

- Continued partnership-based delivery
 - Greater coordination of activity across organisations
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10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Board noted:

- One further meeting would be scheduled in 2026