



Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Board

1 December 2021

Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan Monitoring Report

Purpose of the report:

To update Members on the activities related to the implementation of the Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan (2020 – 2025).

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

1. Members note the activities of the Surrey Hills Family and partners in delivering the AONB Management Plan (2020 – 2025).

Introduction:

2. Although the fundamental purpose of the Management Plan is to encourage co-ordinated action by all organisations, agencies and individuals, the Surrey Hills AONB Board has established a Surrey Hills group of organisations (the Surrey Hills Family) to help support the delivery of the AONB Management Plan's Vision:

The Surrey Hills is recognised as a national asset in which its natural and cultural assets are managed in an attractive landscape mosaic of farmland, woodland, heaths, downs, and commons. It provides opportunities for business enterprise and for all to enjoy and appreciate its natural beauty for their health and well-being.

3. This report provides an overview on progress under the following Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan pillars:
 - Planning

- Landscape Conservation and Enhancement
 - Access, Enjoyment and Understanding
 - Growing the Surrey Hills Economy
 - Advocacy, Partnership and Coordination
4. The Surrey Hills Family framework (Appendix 1) is work in progress to monitor the delivery. This will be reported to the AONB Board and reviewed by Surrey Hills Chairs' Group.

Planning

5. **Surrey Hills Expansion Project.** In June 2021 there was a Ministerial announcement confirming that Natural England would embark on a study to consider the extension of the Surrey Hills AONB. In August an 'Area of Search' was identified and in September Natural England appointed consultants, Resources for Change, to lead a multi-disciplinary team to engage the community to develop the evidence base for an area that Natural England could consider to be the basis for the statutory consultation.
6. The project is supported by a members advisory group that includes the AONB Chair, Planning Adviser and AONB Director. The Surrey Hills Officers Working Group is acting as a Technical Advisory Group, comprised of planning officers from our constituent local authorities. Various presentations have taken place with local authorities and the Chair made a presentation to the Surrey Good Growth Conference in Guildford on 25 November.
7. The project involves the following phases:
 Phase 1: Evidence gathering – unlocking local knowledge through citizen science.
 Phase 2: Evidence review – enabling stakeholders to provide feedback on the emerging picture.
 Phase 3: Engagement on Candidate Areas.
8. **Planning Casework.** Although the level of consultations on development proposals continues to be high, there are currently no major development proposals in the Surrey Hills. Concern continues regarding the sale of land into small plots at Wanborough and Puttenham, and incremental development from the development of equestrian plots, which all demonstrate the importance of maintaining the integrity of farms and estates.
9. **Surrey Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4).** The Surrey Hills AONB Board welcomes the commitment in the draft LTP4, but believes it fails to pay sufficient regard to conserving and enhancing the environment of the Surrey Hills, as well as the provision of access to the countryside for recreation, health and well-being.

Landscape Conservation and Enhancement

10. **Making Space for Nature.** The Nature Recovery Strategy for the Surrey Hills was developed out of the Defra design work for the new Environmental Land Management Scheme as a land manager and farmer led approach to nature recovery. This was profiled at the AONB Board's AGM and at the Surrey Hills Wood Fair in September.
11. **Farming in Protected Landscapes – Surrey Hills Fund.** Defra has allowed AONBs and National Parks to reprofile their budgets over the next three years, which means the Surrey Hills allocation is £280k in 20/21; and circa £380k in 21/22 and 22/23. Grants awards have been made for a variety of projects including the Albury Estate, the Knowle Park Trust and H A Trim following advice from the Local Assessment Panel on 8 October, and smaller grants being made to the Forest Bathing Institute and Surrey Choices. A priority is to encourage more bids from farmers and growers, and a webinar is being organised with support from the CLA and NFU for 30 November.
12. **Land Manager Clusters.** The Surrey Hills contracts facilitators for three cluster schemes, funded under the Defra Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Scheme, which are the North Downs, Greenscapes and West Surrey Greensands. The funding has been extended until 2022 and a priority is to extend the membership, particularly of the North Downs group towards the east Surrey Hills. The facilitators are instrumental in promoting, advising and developing collaborative bids for the Surrey Hills Fund, and part of the budget is being allocated to help support applications,
13. **Surrey Hills Champions.** In a joint venture between Surrey Hills Enterprises and the Society, the first hedgerow trees were planted by our Champions at Clandon Woods Nature Reserve on Sunday 21 November. This will be used as a platform for promoting the Champions programme. The first Corporate Champions will be planting 1000 trees at Knowle Park in Cranleigh in the New Year.

Access, Enjoyment and Understanding

14. **National Landscape.** With support from Defra, the National Association for AONBs has established a task group to look at the branding of AONBs and the renaming of AONBs to National Landscapes. This was a key recommendation of Glover that will not affect the legal basis of the AONB designation, but better reflect the national importance of AONBs to decision makers and the public. The Surrey Hills AONB Director is on the task group which is engaging stakeholders to look at the brand values for how National Landscapes can better represent the nation's diverse communities.

15. **Surrey Hills Website.** Due to staff changes, funding has been secured for a new Surrey Hills website and Surrey Creative has been commissioned following a competitive procurement process. The new website will enable easier content management and a better visitor offering and community hub element, as well as supporting major projects like the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme. The new website will also be a major opportunity to refresh the brand and to demonstrate greater diversity and inclusivity as a National Landscape.
16. **Welcome Surrey Hills – connecting displaced and vulnerable young people with nature.** This is a partnership project, principally funded by Natural England, to co-design, deliver and assess the impact of different nature-based interventions on the health and well-being for vulnerable and displaced young people. Surrey Outdoor Learning and Development will be the main delivery partner working with charities and children’s services, with Surrey University evaluating the impact. It will include the following stages that will take place from December to March:
- Learning to engage with people in the community – feeling **safe** – activity round a campfire.
 - Exploring the community – sense of **belonging** – going on a journey into the Surrey Hills.
 - Giving back to the community – **purpose** – planting a tree as part of a conservation task.
 - Celebration and environmental arts day –**Celebrating** success with a partner.

Although this contract is only for this financial year, we plan to secure further funds to make engaging with nature (diversity and inclusion) a focus of our activity next year, including a Surrey Hills Arts Harvest community celebration with the National Trust at Box Hill and our symposium with Surrey University.

17. **Surrey Strategic Greenway Strategy.** The Leith Hill Greenway project was launched at Denbies on Thursday 23 September with Helyn Clack, the Chairman of Surrey County Council. The key message is about the Greenway being a new multi-user route providing greater access for all. It is hoped that the programme can be supported and extended through the Surrey Local Transport Plan and the new Rights of Way Improvement Plan.
18. **Surrey Hills Society – Making Space for Nature Project.** The Society is commissioning paintings of the 30 Surrey Hills indicator species by an ‘Our Time’ artist at HMP Send as part of a programme delivered by Watts Gallery Trust and funded in collaboration with the Michael Varah Memorial Fund. The aim is to launch the exhibition in May or June 2022. The illustrations will be used to help promote the Making Space for Nature programme including on-site interpretation with QR code links to the new website.

19. **Habitat.** Surrey Hills Arts has been successful in this project to green urban areas and install sculptural habitats working with artists, ecologists and the community working with partners including the University of Surrey and Surrey Wildlife Trust.
20. **Social Media.** The Surrey Hills family continue to use their individual social media channels to share information about all aspects of their work. We encourage you to engage with us on social media.

Family Member	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram
Surrey Hills AONB	7,820	6,205	3,903
Surrey Hills Enterprises	882	n/a	3,318
Surrey Hills Society	370	610	1,516
Surrey Hills Arts	n/a	n/a	3,017

Growing the Surrey Hills Economy

21. **Surrey Hills Artisan Festival and Christmas Fair.** West Horsley Place will be hosting the Surrey Hills Christmas Fair working alongside a group of Surrey arts and crafts organisations on 26, 27 and 28 November. Regular markets are taking place in Cranleigh and there is a permanent position at the Guildford Farmers Market to enable two Surrey Hills businesses to be showcased each month.
22. **Surrey Hills Sustainable Business Conference** Over 100 delegates attend the Surrey Hills Enterprise conference on Friday 22nd October which was generously hosted by Pennyhill Park Hotel. Presentations were given by a wide range of speakers to inspire businesses to become more environmentally sustainable.
23. **The Guide to Surrey Hills.** A new guide to showcase the Surrey Hills and the range of events, activities, local produce, experiences and services within the Surrey Hills will be distributed from December. It features all Surrey Hills Members Enterprises with sponsorship from Squires Garden Centres.

Advocacy. Partnership and Coordination

24. **Constitution Review Working Group.** At the Board meeting in June 2021, the AONB Board agreed to establish a working group to review the Constitution. It has met once and will meet again in the New Year. The formal response from Government to the Glover Review of National Parks and AONBs, that was published on 21 September 2019, is still expected imminently. This is likely to have substantive implications for the governance and funding for AONBs, which the working group will need to consider.

25. **Surrey Hills Staffing.** I am delighted to announce that Emma Cole started as Surrey Hills Communications Lead in October. Christa Emmet also commenced a new role as the Society's Project and Volunteer Coordinator and Antonia Skelton has started work as the Surrey Hills Enterprise Events Manager. We wish them all the best in their new careers with the Surrey Hills family.
26. **Surrey Hills Wood Fair.** Over 5000 people attended the Surrey Hills Enterprise's Wood Fair over the weekend of 11 and 12 September at the Cranleigh Show Ground. This was a major public showcasing event for the Surrey Hills which is the most wooded National Park or AONB in the country with our 40% woodland cover. It was used to promote the new Farming in Protected Landscapes Fund in a Making Space for Nature section that was supported by Surrey County Council's Greener Futures Team.
27. **Surrey Hills Symposium.** Our annual symposium at Surrey University is being planned for Wednesday 24 November. The theme is 'Our Climate and Biodiversity Emergency – how can we inspire action'. It is hosted by the Vice Chancellor, Max Lu, and we have a range of great speakers including the keynote speaker Dr Tony Juniper. The BBC broadcaster Jim Al-Khalili will be chairing the panel debate. Earlier in the afternoon Surrey Hills Arts will be organising a workshop session with various leading environmental artists, and a pre-reception will be used to launch the Surrey Climate Change Delivery Plan.

Conclusions

28. By working in collaboration, the Surrey Hills AONB family manages to deliver across a broad agenda in pursuit of the agreed vision for the Surrey Hills.

Financial and value for money implications

29. The Surrey Hills AONB team delivers the above programme of work within its core budget. Collaborating through the Surrey Hills family and partners demonstrates a high level of success in securing additional resources.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

30. The diversity of the Surrey Hills activities provide a wide range of opportunities to engage residents, businesses, and wider communities to understand, access and enjoy the Surrey Hills.

Risk Management Implications

31. The key risks are identified in the Risk Register that is reported annually to the AONB Board's AGM and is based on reputational, performance, finance, and governance risks. This informs the delivery of the programme to mitigate risks as appropriate.

Next steps:

Member's advice will help to inform the delivery of the AONB Management Plan.

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Sources/background papers:

- The Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan (2020 – 2025)
<https://www.surreyhills.org/board/our-management-plan/>

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