

Section 1



Section 1: Introduction



2008 saw the celebration of 50 years of being designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

1.1 Introduction

This document sets out the vision, policies and plans for the future management of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty for the next 20 years. It has been prepared by the Surrey Hills Board and adopted by the local authority partners as a duty under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The Plan informs the policies and programmes of the local authorities and provides guidance to all the organisations and individuals that have a role in protecting and enhancing the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Section 1 describes the AONB designation and the purpose and preparation of the Management Plan.

Section 2 describes the special features that are the basis of the Surrey Hills being designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the pressures and threats to the landscape.

Section 3 sets out the Vision and the Management Plan Policies.

Section 4 sets out how the Plan will be implemented, monitored and reviewed in the period 2009 - 2014.

Appendix 1 highlights the key AONB features and issues for each of the Landscape Character Areas that were identified in the Surrey Hills Landscape Assessment.¹

1.2 The Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Designation

The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 legislated for the designation of AONBs and National Parks. They were both considered to be of equal landscape status and had the purpose to conserve and enhance natural beauty although National Parks were also to be areas that afford the opportunity for open air recreation for the wider public enjoyment.

There has been clarification regarding the aims of AONB policy since 1949. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (section 87), states that local authorities and public bodies have a duty of regard to:

- (a) The purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty, and
- (b) the purpose of increasing the understanding and enjoyment by the public of the special qualities of the area of outstanding natural beauty,

but if it appears that there is a conflict between those purposes, greater weight should be given to the purpose mentioned in paragraph (a)

1.3 Defining Natural Beauty

Countryside Agency guidance on AONBs provides a useful non-technical definition of natural beauty:

“Natural Beauty is not just the look of the landscape but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries”.²

1 Surrey Hills Landscape Assessment, Countryside Commission, 1998 (CCP 530)

2 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A Guide for AONB Partnership Members, Countryside Agency, 2001 (CA 24))

3 Taken from Landscape Character Assessment Guidance, Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002



View from The Mount in Guildford by Edina Hasulyo. Highly commended in the 50 Year Anniversary Photo Competition

1.4 Defining Landscape³

Landscape is about the relationship between people and place. It results from the way different components of the environment – both natural (the influences of soils, geology, climate, flora and fauna) and cultural (the impact of land use, settlement, enclosure and other human interventions) – interact together and are perceived, as illustrated in Figure 1. It is generally about how we see the landscape, but also how we hear and smell the surroundings, and the feelings, memories and emotions they evoke. Landscape character, which is the pattern that arises from a particular combination of the components, provides us with a sense of place to our surroundings.

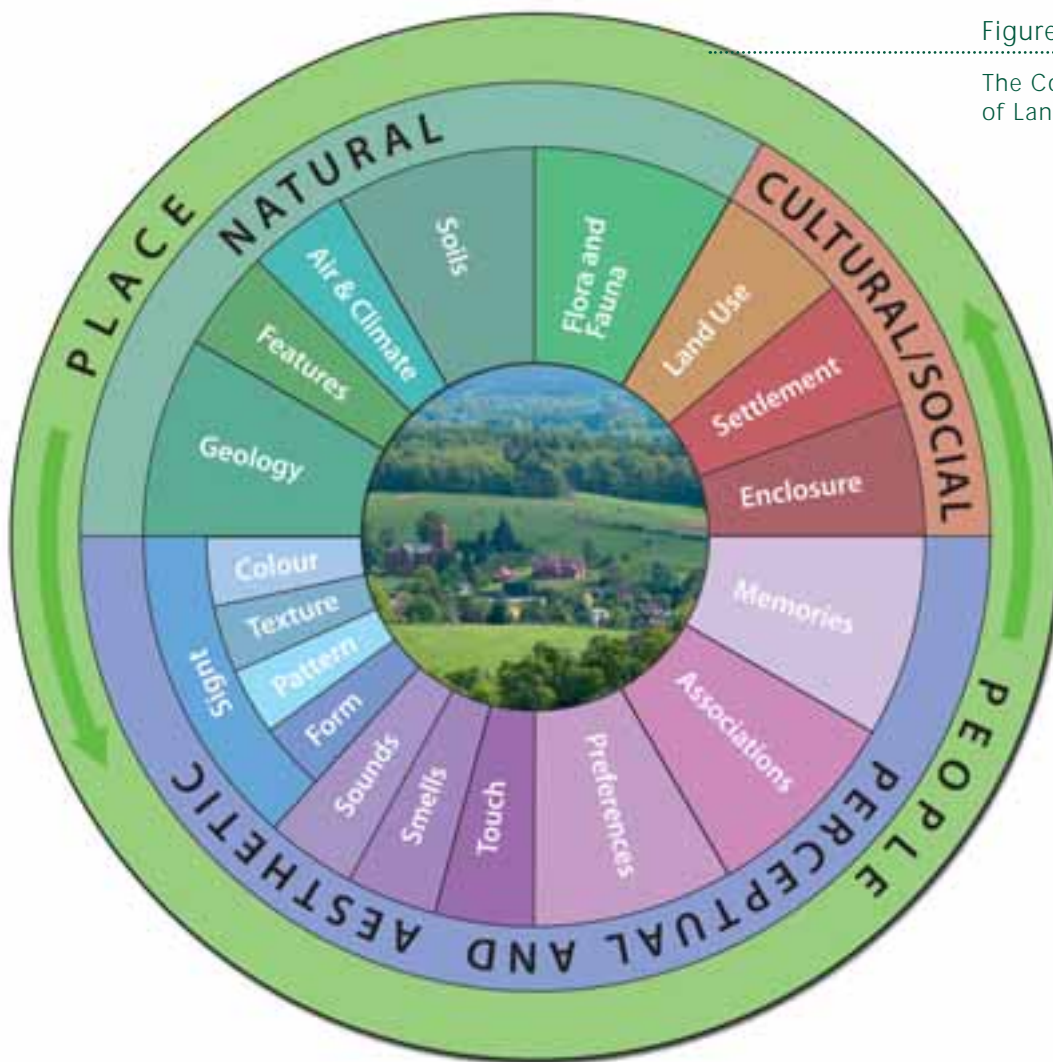


Figure 1
The Components of Landscape

People value landscapes for a variety of reasons, but the appreciation of protected landscapes like the Surrey Hills is because they evoke a sense of beauty and aesthetics, as well as providing habitats for wildlife and a record of how people have lived on the land and harnessed its resources over the centuries. The components that contribute to the outstanding landscape character of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty are described in Section 2.



Farm visit: opening of Puttenham camping barn; and with Minister at Hindhead

1.5 Responsibility for AONB Management

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 incorporates significant measures designed to enhance the management of AONBs by:

- Reaffirming the primary purpose of AONBs.
- Confirming the powers of local authorities to take appropriate action to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of AONBs.
- Placing a duty on all public bodies and statutory undertakers to 'have regard' to the 'purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty'.
- Establishing a process for creating AONB Conservation Boards.
- Creating a statutory responsibility for local authorities and conservation boards to produce and regularly review AONB Management Plans which formulate their policy for the management of their area and their functions in relation to it.

1.5.1 Government, public bodies and agencies

The CROW Act reaffirms the special treatment for AONBs in the following major policy areas:

- The Rural White Paper (Defra, 2000) sets out the key role of AONBs in the wider rural policy context as a nationally protected landscape.
- Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 7 on Countryside and the South East Plan highlights the significance of AONBs in the context of land use planning.
- The Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE)(2008-2013) describes how the government is implementing the 'second pillar' of the Common Agricultural Policy in England, and includes 'better managed landscapes in AONBs and National Parks'.
- The Regional Economic Strategy for South East England 2002-2012 (SEEDA) recognises the contribution of AONBs to sustainable economic growth.
- Tourism South East's regional tourism strategy "Tourism Excellence" (2004) recognises the importance of protected landscapes and has a specific priority to "Develop the potential of the rural tourism product through working with AONBs, Rural Ways and Rural Tourism Future."
- The Forestry Commission is committed to ensuring its work reflects the distinctive nature of each AONB and helps deliver the priorities identified in AONB Management Plans through Local Accords.
- Natural England provides the Government's direct involvement in the management of AONBs to implement policy and provide the majority of funding for AONB Partnerships.

1.5.2 Local authorities

Since the 1949 Act, local planning authorities have been central to achieving the purpose of AONB designation, and their responsibility has been reaffirmed in the CROW Act 2000, in which they are empowered to "take such action as appears to them expedient for the accomplishment of the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty" of the AONB.

1.5.3 Other relevant authorities

The CROW Act 2000 requires that relevant authorities, in addition to government and local planning authorities, should 'have regard' to the purpose of the AONBs: these include statutory undertakers and public utilities, community and parish councils, and holders of public office.



Supporting Surrey Hills Wood Fuel and with Lord Whitby and Surrey Quality producers

1.5.4 AONB Partnerships

The need for active measures to conserve and enhance AONBs has led to the establishment of AONB-wide partnerships of representatives of local authorities, public bodies and agencies, landowners, land managers and farmers, and other special interest groups. The partnerships are serviced by AONB units that are responsible for overseeing the governance of the AONB, including the preparation and coordinated implementation of the Management Plan. This involves coordinating and demonstrating best practice in the protection and enhancement of AONBs; promoting the purpose, significance and character of the AONB; advising and guiding stakeholders; seeking funding to assist management activity; undertaking or commissioning research; and monitoring the condition of the AONB.

1.6 The Role and Status of the Management Plan

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW) placed a statutory duty on all local authorities to prepare and adopt a Management Plan for their AONBs. Adoption of the Management Plan policies by the constituent local authorities, and the support for them from stakeholders and members of the AONB Partnership, demonstrate a clear commitment to giving due regard both to the AONB designation and to the delivery of statutory and other management activities outlined in the Plan. However, AONB management plan policies, although of equal importance as a national designation, are not equivalent to local development frameworks.

1.6.1 Plan and Strategy Context

There are a great number of plans and strategies that impact on the Surrey Hills landscape, economy and community. They operate at a national level (eg. National Planning Policy Statements), at regional level (eg. South East Plan, Regional Economic Strategy, Regional Transport Strategy), a county level (eg. Waste and Mineral Local Development Frameworks, Surrey Cultural Strategy, Surrey Rural Strategy) and a local level (eg. local development frameworks, community strategies, parish plans). The important focus of the Management Plan, and what will differentiate it from all the other plans and strategies, is the primary purpose to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Surrey Hills area. The Management Plan recognises however that this can only be achieved by having a regard to all the other related plans and strategies, and to the economic and social well being of the area.

1.6.2 Areas of Great Landscape Value

Significant parts of the Surrey countryside adjacent to the AONB are designated at a county level as Areas of Great Landscape Value (AGLV). These areas act as a buffer to the AONB but they also have their own inherent landscape quality and are significant in conserving the landscape setting of some towns. Although AGLV land is not a national designation with equal status to the AONB, this Management Plan recognises the importance of AGLV land in protecting the integrity of the Surrey Hills AONB landscape, particularly views to and from the AONB. The application of the Management Plan policies and actions to AGLV land will be instrumental in helping to conserve and enhance the Surrey Hills.

The Surrey Hills Board has written to Natural England to formally request a boundary review of the AONB based on the level of local support established amongst local authorities and parish councils for its retention. As a formal review of the AONB boundary is not likely to take place within the period of this Plan, local authorities are being encouraged to adopt a specific policy for the AONB and AGLV land in their respective core strategies, unless satisfied that detailed landscape character assessment can be comprehensive enough to ensure the safeguarding of the landscape quality within the AGLV in advance of any review of the AONB.



*Hindhead
Together Meeting.
Surrey Hills
exhibiting at
Country Fair,
Loseley Park*

1.7 Review of the Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan 2004 - 2009

The constituent local authorities in the Surrey Hills agreed that the Surrey Hills AONB Board (as a Joint Management Committee) would coordinate the preparation of the Management Plan on their behalf. However all the local authorities have been required to individually adopt the reviewed Management Plan. The review of the 2004 – 2009 Management Plan was led by the Surrey Hills AONB Director with the guidance and support of the Surrey Hills Officers Working Group and the Surrey Hills AONB team.

Natural England prepared guidance to advise on AONB management plan reviews to ensure they:

- meet the requirements of the legislation.
- recognise the opportunity to promote the purposes and priorities of the AONB among partners and key stakeholders.
- address issues that are new for AONBs or have changed since the first round of management plans.
- build on best practice from producing and implementing the first round of plans; and
- are practical, realistic and cost-effective reviews.

The key issues Natural England highlighted that needed to be addressed through Management Plan review included:

Nationally Protected Landscapes.

The Guidance stated that Plans should explain the significance of the area as a Protected Landscape; place the plan in the context of other Protected Landscapes in the region; and place the plan in the context of the family of National Parks and AONBs in England and Wales.

Sustainable development.

AONBs should be exemplars of sustainable development practice. Policies should always be developed with sustainable development principles in mind. This means looking for solutions to issues which deliver benefits for the environment, community and economy together. This guidance however may in some cases be contrary to the guidance to focus on the primary purpose which is to protect and enhance the landscape quality.

Climate change.

Addressing climate change through actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to mitigate against climate change impacts is a Government and Natural England priority. AONB Management Plan policies should be developed accordingly. Policies in the plan should be assessed for their impact on climate change as part of the SEA process.

EC Water Framework Directive.

The aim of this Directive is to safeguard and improve water quality. It will do this through River Basin Management Plans which will develop the links between surface and groundwater, and water quantity and water quality. AONB Management Plans should recognise the importance of the water environment and articulate the steps that will be taken within the AONB to meet Water Framework Directive objectives, encouraging appropriate partnerships with the Environment Agency (the lead agency) and action in priority catchments.

Agri-environment and woodland management delivery programmes.

AONB Management Plans should recognise the importance of these grant programmes for achieving AONB objectives and should set out how the partnership will secure maximum advantage from them.

A Spatial Approach.

The Guidance states that consideration should be given to developing objectives and policies for specific areas within the AONB, for example on the basis of discrete landscape character types. Spatially targeted policies might best be presented in a document separate from the management plan as guidance on implementation



*At the County Show.
The launch of Discover
Gatton*

1.7.1 The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

The process of reviewing the AONB Management Plan included the production of a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Environment Report. The Strategic Environmental Assessment is a EU Directive requiring that plans and programmes that might have significant effects on the environment are subjected to strategic level assessment of options and alternative courses of action during plan preparation in order to avoid or mitigate any adverse effects. SEA should be undertaken alongside all AONB management plans and also subject to an element of independent review. A consultant was therefore commissioned to assist in the preparation of the SEA and Environment Report as part of the Management Plan process.

1.7.2 Expert Panels

The key delivery mechanism for the Review was through small Expert Panels. The Panels reviewed the relevant sections of the existing AONB Management Plan and SEA in order to formulate the management plan policies, identify the issues and key actions for the following topics:

- Farming
- Woodland
- Biodiversity
- Historic and Cultural Heritage
- Recreation and Tourism
- Land Use Planning
- Transport and Traffic
- Community Development and the Local Economy

The Expert Panels were chaired by members of the Surrey Hills Board with a support officer to advise the Surrey Hills AONB Director on briefing papers for the meetings. The Expert Panel provided an opportunity for key partners and stakeholders to get together to pool their national, regional and local knowledge to identify common aims, an understanding of the issues and how they could be addressed through proposing and discussing management plan actions. The Expert Panels took place in May and June 2008. Over 80 people took part in the Panels, representing 45 different organisations and businesses.

1.7.3 Public Consultation

The public consultation on the review of the Management Plan and SEA took place between 31st July to the 15th September. There were 55 written responses to the Management Plan Consultation Document, including 20 individuals and organisations completing the online survey. 20 members of the Surrey Hills Partnership attended a workshop in September. An over-riding issue arising out of the exercise was the lack of awareness of the Surrey Hills and understanding of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty designation. This was particularly evident through feedback from the public and at the Partnership workshop at which frustration was expressed about the difficulty of getting the Management Plan owned, used and delivered through others because of this fundamental lack of awareness. As the AONB has equivalent landscape status and protection to a National Park, some consultees thought that the obvious solution would be to change the promotional name to National Park as there was a greater awareness of this designation.

Overall, respondents were satisfied with the content and structure of the Management Plan. The major concern was expressed through various members of the Surrey Countryside Access Forum (Ramblers Association, Open Spaces Society, British Horse Society etc) that the plan should be more positive about recreation, and stated that this was the thrust of the CROW Act 2000. There was also some dissatisfaction that the Management Plan did not have enough teeth to address problems relating to access, including the impact of traffic, mountain biking and off-road vehicles.



Walkers taking part in The Journey, a walk across the Surrey Hills. The Launch of the Welcome Pack and Explore Leaflet

1.7.4 Adoption of Management Plan

An amended copy of the Management Plan was presented to the Surrey Hills Board on 4th December. The Board agreed the amendments and recommended the document for adoption by its constituent local authorities.

The Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan was adopted by the constituent local authorities as follows:

Guildford Borough Council Executive on 28th March 2009

Mole Valley District Council Executive on 10th February 2009.

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council Executive on 19th February 2009

Tandridge District Council Planning Policy Committee on 5th March 2009

Surrey County Council Executive on 17th February 2009

Waverley Borough Council Executive on 3rd March 2009

1.8 Monitoring the condition of the Surrey Hills AONB

Assessing the changes in the condition of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is an important element of AONB management. It will enable the Surrey Hills Board and others to understand how the landscape is being conserved and enhanced, how its enjoyment by the public has been secured, and how the social and economic well being of local communities may have changed. An important Management Plan task will be to identify key indicators and resources to measure the quality of the Surrey Hills and the effectiveness of its management. This will be used as a basis for reviewing the Management Plan.

A 'State of the Surrey Hills AONB' report is identified as an action in Section 4 as a project that will need to involve data collection, collation and analysis locally but also regionally and nationally to benchmark with other AONBs and National Parks as a family of nationally protected landscapes.

1.9 Management Plan Review

The Surrey Hills Management Plan is required, under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, to be reviewed at intervals of not less than every five years after its publication. The Surrey Hills Board will also publish an Annual Report that will monitor and review the implementation of the Management Plan.