

Date: 16th July 2008
Report: Surrey Hills AONB Unit Update
Written by: Surrey Hills AONB Unit

Purpose of Report

To update the Board on the activities of the Surrey Hills AONB Unit.

Summary

Although future AONB Unit reports will be more closely aligned to the priorities set out in the AONB Management Plan and the service level agreement with Natural England. This report refers to activities reflected in the existing AONB Management Plan:

- o AONB Management, Partnership and Coordination, including Hindhead Together
- o Landscape, Conservation and Access
- o Developing the AONB Economy
- o Raising Awareness and Understanding, including activity relating to the 50th Anniversary of the AONB designation

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the AONB Unit activity and advise on priorities, as appropriate

Background papers:

Attached:

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AONB MANAGEMENT, PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION

- 1. Surrey Hills Partnership.** The first meeting of the Surrey Hills Partnership was on Wednesday 21st May. It was held at the Devil's Punchbowl Hotel, Hindhead. In the morning the Partnership were briefed on the new administrative arrangements for the Surrey Hills AONB by Mike Dawson and given an introduction to the AONB and the work of the Unit by Rob Fairbanks. Mike Taylor, Chief Officer for the National Association for AONBs provided a national policy and issues context. Caroline White introduced her work as the Hindhead Together Coordinator and introduced the afternoon session which was a tour of the Hindhead area to look at regeneration and land management issues.
- 2 Ministerial Visit.** Jonathon Shaw, Defra Minister and Minister for the South East will be visiting the Surrey Hills on 2nd October. The purpose of the visit is to look at issues affecting the AONB. Members ideas for this are welcome.
- 3. Natural England.** Helen Phillips, the Chief Executive of Natural England, will be visiting the Surrey Hills on 4th September. She has written to the Partnership confirming Natural England will fund AONBs on a 3 year programme based on a Service Level Agreement which is now under discussion.
- 4. National Association for AONBs (NAAONB).** The National Association is considering options for its future funding and will table a paper at its AGM in July. The NAAONB are also consulting AONB partnerships on a Strategic Agreement between the itself and Natural England. The Agreement will inform the development of Service Level Agreements with each AONB Partnership from April 2009. Michael Sydney continues to chair the national Communications Group, which is progressing a renewed Communications Strategy, Brand and Website with the intention of launching these in April 2009..
- 5. SEEDA Relationship.** Chris Reynolds, the Chairman of the Kent Downs AONB and acting Chairman of the SEPL had met with Oona Muirhead, SEEDA's Sustainable Prosperity Director with the Kent Downs Director and the SEPL Regional Lead. The notes of the meeting and covering letter are attached for information. Laura Newland is leading SEPL's development of the agreed actions with SEEDA.
- 6. Celebrating 60 Years of Natural Beauty** Laura Newland is leading the development of the regional plan to celebrate the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 that provided for the creation of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Funding is currently being sought for a Regional Protected Landscape Prospectus that sets out the original reasons behind the protection of natural beauty and the business case for their continuing protection. A series of regional position statements are also planned relating to generic threats such as aviation, poly-tunnels and windfarms. The

celebration will culminate in a Protected Landscape Summit, planned for autumn 2009.

7. **Audit of Small Businesses by the Audit Commission.** The Audit Commission has decided that organisations led by a joint management committee must be independently audited. This is affecting AONBs nationally. The process has started and covers financial years 2006/2007 and 2007/2008. It is expected to be complete by the end of October 08. There will be a cost implication that should be around £1400 for each financial year. The likely outcome should be reported back in September.
8. **Finance & Monitoring of Budgets.** Ongoing monitoring of budgets ensuring that interim and final grant claims are submitted on time to Natural England and other funding organisations. Detailed outturn figures to be reported to the Board for September meeting.

Staffing update. Caroline Cation will be going on maternity leave from November. The AONB Director is behind in the recruitment of the Planning Officer but plans to advertise this position over the Summer. In the meantime, the saving on the salary is helping to fund some of the Mnaagement Plan consultancy and publication costs.

Hindhead Together

9. **Concept Statement.** As a result of an extremely successful Public Community Exhibition, Hindhead Together approved the final Concept Statement in April 2008. It was accepted by the Executive of Waverley Borough Council, the planning authority, “fully and with great acclaim” in May. It will be presented to the full Council meeting in July 08 and it is hoped that the Concept Statement will be adopted as a material consideration in any planning decisions in the Hindhead area.
10. **Landowner Forum.** Hindhead Together is planning to host a progress forum with stakeholders and landowners later n the year in order that updates can be given on progress made with planning applications or ideas, in line with the principles of the Concept Statement. It is planned to invite The National Trust, as a major landowners to present on their ideas for moving forwards and also to invite key landowners in the area to participate in an open discussion.
11. **Hindhead Together Work Plan.** The work plan for 2008/09 is being finalised, and in order to achieve the objective of Hindhead Together; to maximise the community, economic, environmental and landscape benefits it is intended to co-ordinate a Green Infrastructure Plan, a Community Infrastructure Study and a Marketing and Engagement Plan for the area. These detailed pieces of work will enable development packages to be put together, will inform future work of the partnership and will demonstrate Hindhead Together’s vital role as a facilitator in securing a brighter future for the Hindhead area

12. **Communications.** Communications remain vital to Hindhead Together and a project is being put together involving enhanced communications in order to promote the work within the community. A newsletter, improved website, updated public display and new waymarkers are all part of this communications project for which joint funding is being sought from the Surrey Hills Sustainable Development Fund, Natural England, The National Trust and The Highways Agency.
13. **Hindhead History Group.** The Hindhead Together History Group is beginning to undertake training in digital audio recording facilities and also learning what resources are available at the Surrey History Centre in order to research, archive and communicate the history of the local area. It is hoped that this work will be funded by a Heritage Lottery Fund grant working with the Surrey Hills AONB Projects officer.

LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION AND ACCESS PROJECTS.

14. **Landscape Enhancement of Country Lanes.** This has all been very well received although there have been delays over installation and some signs do need correcting. These new boundary markers, with the logo and the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty wording, are proposed to be installed on A roads, but locations and costs are still to be finalised. A budget of about £20k has been allocated for 2008/09 with the main focus for the highway finger posts will be the replacement of dilapidated signs in the Waverley area. Pilot areas are also being looked at to identify conservation verges which can be managed by appropriate mowing regimes agreed with parish councils.
15. **Discover Gatton.** The final claim for this Your Heritage project has been submitted to HLF, and further details of the volunteer input to the project have been requested. The walk leaflet is proving very popular, and visitor numbers at Gatton Park open days this year have increased significantly. The Surrey Hills Society walked the route on June 4 as part of a tour of Reigate Hill and Gatton Park, which featured on BBC Southern Counties Radio.
16. **Reigate Hill Gateway Project.** The Discover Gatton project partners are now looking at the redevelopment of the Wray Lane car park as a gateway to Gatton Park and Reigate Hill. Initial targets are to improve the highway signage to the car park, and to involve the Highways Agency, landowner of Fort Lane.
17. **Green Infrastructure.** Plans for green infrastructure and spine networks, looking initially at the Thames Down Link are being developed by colleagues in Surrey County Council. Another project currently underway with the Lower Mole Countryside Management Project and MVDC is the upgrading and enhancement of the Mole Gap Trail.
18. **Off-road vehicles.** A working group has been established following the Leith Hill Access Meeting last October to look at the management of BOATs and

off-road vehicles. The group has reviewed the Traffic Regulation Order policy and off-road management policy, which will be the basis of a report to the Surrey Hills Board in September as it suggests that a more strategic, perhaps AONB wide, approach is required.

19. **Mountain biking.** Various surveys of mountain biking are underway and a working group has been established to develop a position statement and map all the key mountain bike routes in the Leith Hill and Hurtwood area. A paper will be brought to a future Surrey Hills Board meeting.
20. **Undergrounding of Electricity Supplies.** A letter was sent in June, on behalf of the Board, to Ofgem in support of a Phase 2 programme to underground power lines in the Surrey Hills. Through the Phase 1 programme, the Surrey Hills AONB has secured an investment in excess of £1.5m (potentially £1.9m). Enclosed with the letter was a pack which outlined the undergrounding schemes in the Surrey Hills; identified potential future projects; demonstrated the high level of support amongst partners organisations and our local communities; and contained copies of some of the press coverage already received. Many thanks to all those who submitted supporting evidence and particularly to Dave Symonds, landscape adviser at Surrey County Council, for leading on this locally and to Lorraine Huggett at Natural England for leading on this regionally.

DEVELOPING THE AONB ECONOMY

- 21 **Surrey Hills Food and Drink.** There is a lot of renewed activity and interest in the Surrey Hills brand. Another meeting is being set up with SQP and Regional Farm Foods Ltd with a view to it taking a majority shareholding in SQP. This will follow the business model of Regional Farm Foods marketing and distributing South Downs Meat on behalf of its producers group. There is also a business plan being developed for 'A Taste of Surrey Hills', to use the brand and develop a food hub; 'road show', distribution business. The RDPE and the Surrey Hills Leader programmes are opportunities to provide investment. Many thanks to Mike Giffin for his support in this area.
22. **Surrey Hills Wood Fuel Association.** This group was established under the Defra Biofuel Infrastructure Grant Scheme, for which the funding ends in October 2008. It has been successful in getting a regular and active wood fuel forum off the ground and establishing wood chip and wood pellet operations.
23. **Visit Surrey Partnership.** The Board agreed in principle to support the new Visit Surrey Partnership as a core funding partner and to review this on an annual basis. The Visit Surrey website includes information on the Surrey Hills and will be used to sign post visitors from the Surrey Hills web-site for information on attractions, accommodation, booking events etc. The Partnership has now secured the funding to employ a full time Development Manager.
24. **Regional Joint Tourism Project.** The South East Protected Landscape Tourism Group, under the Leadership of Laura, the Regional Coordinator, has been working with Tourism South East to develop a collaborative project submission to SEEDA for RDPE Axis 3 funding. The project would involve

working with local tourism providers to develop short break guides targeted at specific users such as health and wellbeing. The project is eligible for 100% funding and would be delivered over 3 years, with a total budget of £1.26 million.

RAISING AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING

- 25. 50th Anniversary of the Surrey Hills AONB.** As the 50th Anniversary year is a one-off celebration, there is a considerable impact on the AONB unit staff resources. The AONB Director has been taking overall responsibility to ensure that a range of high profile activities will be delivered but assigning key roles and responsibilities to team members for certain activities. Some of the additional funds however are being used to provide extra support, including PR work and project coordination. Another guiding principle for the year is to maximise the volunteer support, which includes working closely with the Surrey Hills Society on the delivery of the Your Heritage 50 Years of Food and Farming project.
- 26. Your Heritage Grant.** The £42,500 Your Heritage grant has been awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund towards a total estimated expenditure of £76,000 which includes financial and in-kind match funding. It is also hoped that some funding from the Sustainable Development Fund could be available to support certain awareness raising and interpretation activities, which is referred to under Agenda Item 8. Another £10,000 of commercial sponsorship was secured from Ringway towards the House of Commons Reception on 8th May.
- 27. Surrey Library Cards.** Surrey County Council is considering producing 50,000 library cards with John Miller images taken from the calendar in May.
- 28. House of Commons Reception.** We were blessed with good weather for the 8th May event. A celebratory brochure was produced for the event as well as exhibition material. All the Mayors and Chairmen of the respective local authorities attended, as well as the Lord Lieutenant, the High Sheriff and our Patron, Penelope Keith. Photos from the event will be on display at the Board meeting.
- 29. Commemorative Magazine.** Sheengate Publishing has agreed to be our media partner for the 50th anniversary. Souvenir commemorative editions of the Surrey Downs and Guildford Magazine in May with articles devoted to the Surrey Hills and 50th anniversary. More publicity will follow.
- 30. Photographic competition.** In association with Sheengate Publishing, we promoted a competition to capture inspiring images of the Surrey Hills landscape. The competition was launched at the Surrey Photographic Society's exhibition at the Guildford House Gallery at the end of March. The winning images will be exhibited at the Guildford House Gallery's Surrey Hills exhibition and the winning image will feature on the front cover of the Guildford and Surrey Downs Autumn magazines.

- 31. Surrey County Show.** The Surrey Hills had a large marquee at the Show on 26th May. It included an exhibition of farming through the ages; exhibition materials and displays; recording oral histories and memories; and creative environmental workshop. It was also an opportunity to promote the Surrey Hills Society and other opportunities for people to support the Surrey Hills including local products and wood fuel. Partners include the Surrey County Agricultural Society, Surrey Heritage, Surrey Archaeological Unit and Surrey County Arts. The appalling weather kept many visitors away but we all had a good time dancing with the Morris Men and won 3rd Prize for the exhibition.
- 32. Research.** Through the HLF project work is being undertaken to show how the landscape has changed over the last fifty years. Workshops are taking place with organisations like Butterfly Conservation, Surrey Bat Group, some parish council groups to research their areas of interest and produce simple exhibition material.
- 33. Surrey Farming and Food Week (22nd to 28th September).** The Surrey Hills, with HLF funding, is sponsoring this programme which will include farm walks with a 50 Years of Food and Farming in the Surrey Hills theme, and a presence at the Loseley Country Fair and Ploughing Match on Sunday 28th September.
- 34. Guildford House Gallery Exhibition.** We will be holding an exhibition at the Guildford House Gallery in August & September. The exhibition will showcase photographs and art focusing on ‘then and now’ in the Surrey Hills. There will be a wide variety of talks, workshops and opportunities for people to get involved. Talks include Matthew Alexander on Tales of Life in the Surrey Hills on 21st August and Charles Brooking “Saving architectural artefacts of the Surrey Hills” on 10th September. All Board Members will be invited to the Private View on Monday 18th August.
- 35. Surrey Hills Country Fair (2nd November).** Again with HLF funding we will be supporting the Surrey Hills Society to host this event at the Dorking Halls on Sunday 2nd November. It will bring all the material together to show the role agriculture has played in shaping the landscape, the special nature of the AONB and how specific local areas have changed over the recent past. There will be an opportunity for local producers and crafts people to sell their wares.
- 36. The Surrey Hills Website.** Caroline has commissioned a new web design company, Dial Media based in Guildford. The Surrey Hills website is undergoing a complete re-design including the implementation of a fully content managed site. The objectives are to freshen up the look of the site, make it more dynamic and interactive, and to be more cost effective in the long run due to the ability to adapt and develop the site ‘in-house’. The site will have a large focus on the management of the Surrey Hills and members of the board will have the opportunity to be profiled on the site as well as be able to download minutes of meetings and agendas etc.

37. **Surrey Hills Book.** Although not funded by the Surrey Hills Board, Jane Garrett has been commissioned to write a book celebrating the Surrey Hills and its heritage. It should be published by the end of the year.
38. **Distribution.** Bulk distribution through libraries, TIC's and attractions continues to be monitored to gauge the demand for publicity material. The website is proving a more and more popular way for people to order leaflets, this will need to be monitored as postage costs are rising as a result.