



Country Lanes in the Surrey Hills

Guidance on protecting and enhancing the rural character
of country lanes in the Surrey Hills



1 Choose appropriate materials. Timber bollards, marker posts and other roadside furniture should be used as they are more in keeping with the rural scene. Generally avoid plastic roadside furniture.



2 Value the treatment of boundaries. Boundary fences should use traditional local materials. Generally use native species and avoid introducing exotics.

Introduction

The Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is one of 36 nationally protected landscapes in England, having equal landscape status and protection to a National Park. All public bodies have a 'statutory duty of regard' to protecting and enhancing the natural beauty of the Surrey Hills landscape.

A key landscape feature of the Surrey Hills is the network of winding, narrow, secluded lanes, often with high banks and hedgerows, connecting villages and hamlets. These lanes are often rich in history reflecting centuries of human use and still retain much of their traditional charm. The purpose of this leaflet is to provide guidance on protecting and enhancing the rural character of these country lanes to ensure that they continue to contribute to the outstanding natural beauty and heritage of the area.

This leaflet has been prepared to help Surrey County Council's transportation services, contractors, parish councils and other parties involved in the management of country lanes. It is not intended to be a definitive design guide or a prescriptive set of rules, rather it offers some basic principles which should be considered in maintenance and improvement programmes. It also highlights examples of best practice from within the county of sensitive, low maintenance measures that help to protect and enhance the rural quality of country lanes.

Background

The Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan (2004) seeks to provide opportunities for people to enjoy country lanes in greater safety. It identifies the need to encourage drivers to reduce their speed and drive more considerately, whilst also providing a wider transport choice for local people and creating more pleasant links between communities. The aims for country lanes are to:

- Protect and enhance their rural and historic character
- Discourage through traffic and inappropriate use by HGVs
- Reduce traffic speeds and make lanes safer, quieter and more accessible for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians.

Country lanes are generally not capable of coping with modern day traffic volumes and speeds, or the huge diversity in the mode of transport users. These pressures, combined with creeping 'urbanisation' associated with signs, kerbs and other traffic management features, can have a negative impact on the character and amenity value of many country lanes in the Surrey Hills.

The variety of associated problems and issues faced by country lanes means that an individual approach is required which takes into account the existing character of the lanes. This makes it imperative that relevant local groups and engineers are engaged in identifying the specific problems and possible solutions.

Although the safety of all road users is a primary consideration, recent experience has shown that one of the best ways to improve safety is to increase or make use of the perception of danger. By incorporating the principles set out in this leaflet into the management of country lanes will help to promote and reinforce their rural character and encourage a safer and more considerate approach to driving in the Surrey Hills.



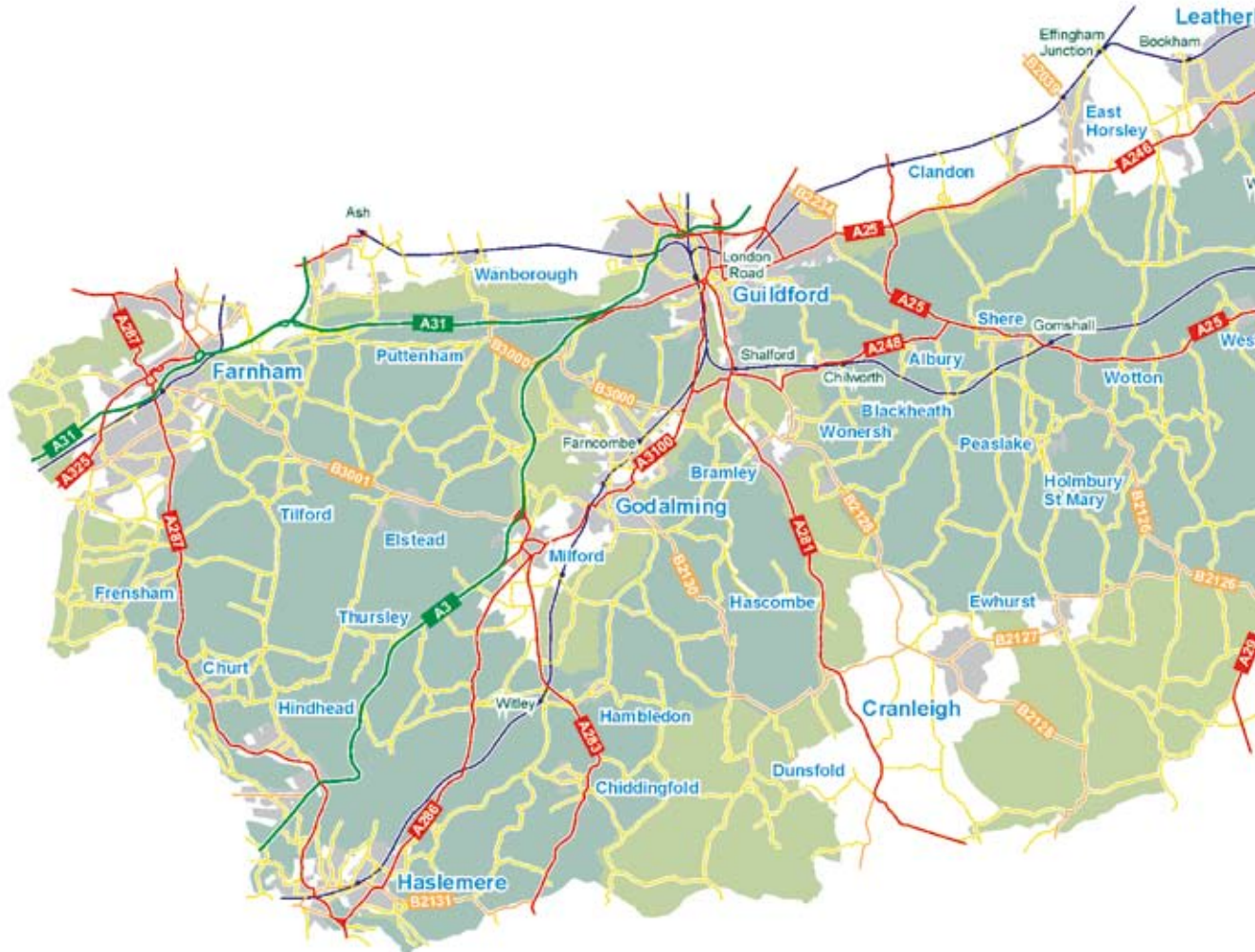
3 Reinforce the 'natural' geometry of country lanes to influence drivers. Surface dressing can be used to visually narrow the road space, help avoid over-running and help create refuge space for other road users.



4 Resist excess road markings. Where possible, road markings should be resisted or in some cases removed. Edge lining should be used with care, usually where other solutions to verge erosion are impractical.

The Surrey Hills

The map identifies the network of roads in the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV) that provides a buffer to the AONB.

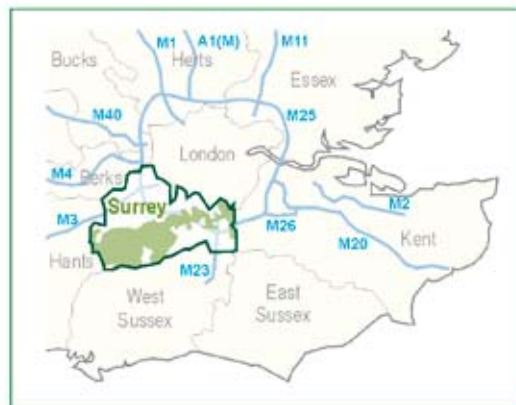
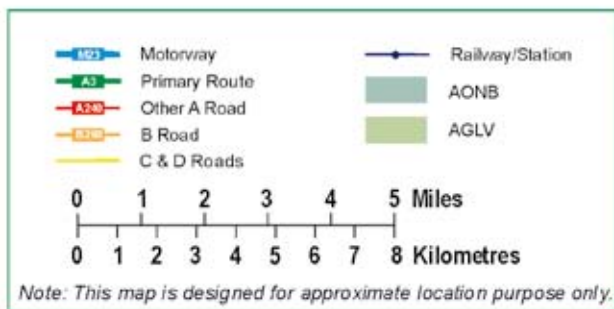
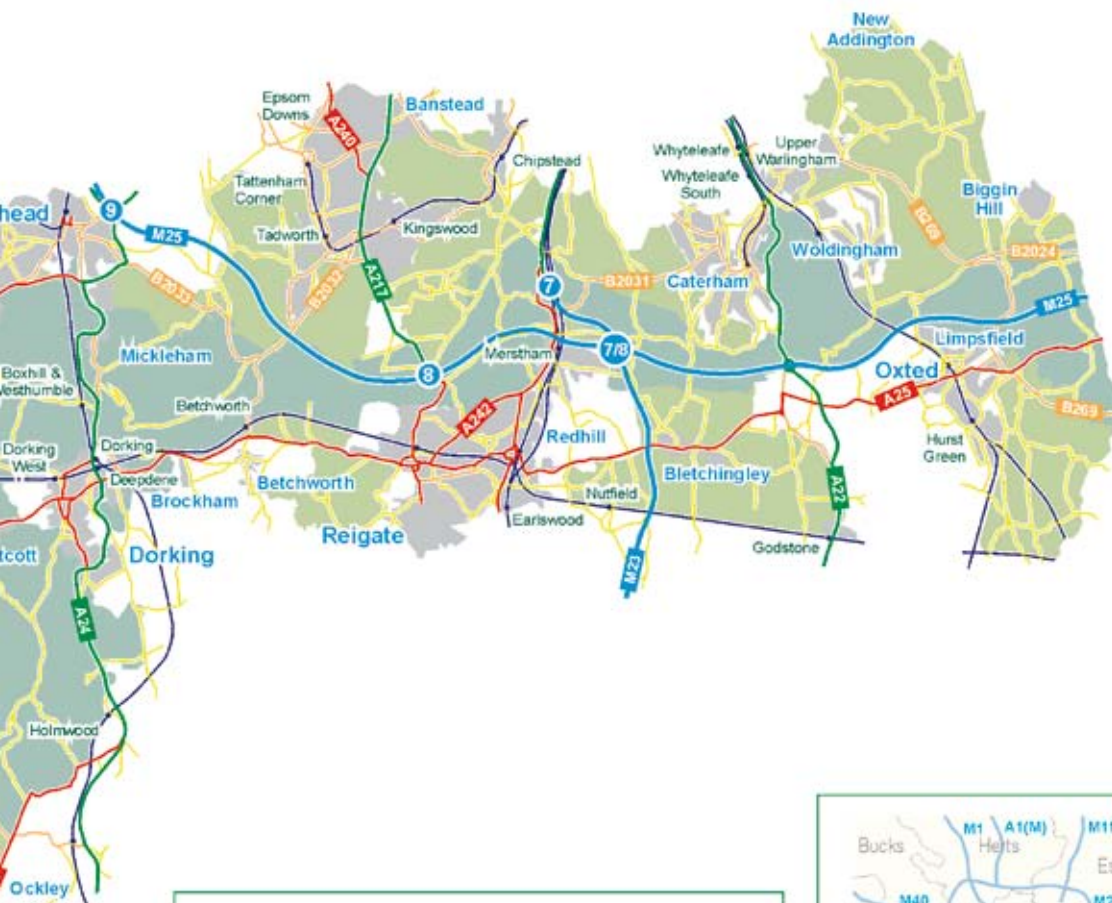




5 Reduce clutter and urbanising influences. Speed limits now cover many Surrey villages. Here in Outwood low wooden posts reduce the impact of repeater signs.



6 Celebrate local distinctiveness. Where practical, preserve and restore existing distinctive and historic finger posts, village signs and other roadside furniture.



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7 Highlight local names and features of historic interest. For street names, traditional looking black and white signs are generally preferable. Recycled plastic posts (as shown) are acceptable for most situations.



8 Enhance the biodiversity of verges and maintain views. Enhance the biodiversity value of verges by using appropriate mowing regimes, and seek opportunities to open up views of countryside.

Principles of good design and management

Designing and managing country lanes in line with the following principles will create an environment that is more attractive and help to encourage a safer and more considerate approach to driving in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The photographs in this leaflet identify how the principles could be implemented through simple low maintenance measures.

- 1 **Choose appropriate materials.** Timber bollards, marker posts and other roadside furniture should be used as they are generally more in keeping with the rural scene, do not need painting or become dirty in appearance and are not easily damaged. Generally avoid plastic roadside furniture (eg plastic posts) and excessive reflective metal signs.
- 2 **Value the treatment of boundaries.** Boundary fences, walls and hedgerows should use traditional local materials and species (such as chestnut spiling, native plants, and sandstone or flint walls) which are in keeping with the locality. Generally use native species and avoid introducing exotics (such as leylandii). Use hedgerows to maintain or enhance the narrow width and to discourage use by through traffic.
- 3 **Reinforce the 'natural' geometry of country lanes to influence drivers.** Highway improvements should consider reinforcing the traditional geometry of country lanes. Surface dressing of a coarser aggregate can be used to create rough verges to avoid over-running, help create refuge space for other road users and reduce vehicle speeds. Concrete kerbing is generally obtrusive and should be avoided.
- 4 **Resist excess road markings.** Where possible, road markings should be resisted or in some cases removed. Edge lining should be used with care, usually where other solutions to verge erosion are impractical. Coloured road surfaces are generally obtrusive and have a limited life, and therefore should be avoided. Rumble strips should emphasise the sensory rather than visual impact.
- 5 **Reduce clutter and urbanising influences.** Remove unnecessary or redundant signs and amalgamate signs onto posts. Through signing should be avoided along country lanes. Signs directing traffic into and along country lanes should only indicate the next village or hamlet.
- 6 **Celebrate local distinctiveness.** Where practical, preserve and restore existing distinctive and historical finger posts, village signs and other roadside furniture. Where this is not possible, replace with similar materials and design details. Use sympathetic designs and materials for new finger posts and village signs.
- 7 **Highlight local names and features of historic interest.** For street names, traditional looking black and white signs are generally preferable. Where street names occur adjacent to other timber structures then timber support will be generally more appropriate, but recycled plastic posts are acceptable for most situations.
- 8 **Enhance the biodiversity of verges and maintain views.** Within safety guidelines to maintain sight lines, particularly at junctions, enhance the biodiversity value of verges with appropriate mowing regimes. Verges may benefit from less frequent mowing resulting in reduced maintenance costs.



Photo by John Miller

The Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

This leaflet aims to raise awareness of the importance of country lanes in the Surrey Hills and to promote measures that reinforce the rural character of the area through sensitive design and maintenance.

The Surrey Hills was one of the first landscapes in the country to be designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1958. It is now one of 36 AONBs in England and has equal status in landscape and planning terms to a National Park. The Surrey Hills stretch across rural Surrey, covering about a quarter of the county.

Narrow, winding country lanes are a characteristic feature of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). They can be of considerable biodiversity as well as historic value.

Many country lanes, along with other routeways, such as bridleways, byways or footpaths, are important historic landscape features which can still retain much of the atmosphere of times before the invention of the combustion engine. Frequently associated with country lanes are old sign posts, milestones, former drovers' ponds, roadside quarries for stone to repair the track, and ancient pollarded trees. The last often mark where parish, manor or ownership boundaries cross routes.

Country lanes are commonly narrow routes bounded on either side by hedges, shaws or fences, sinuous in form as they link farm to farm and hamlet to hamlet.

A particular characteristic feature of the Surrey Hills is the hollow way, or sunken lane. The relatively soft geology together with the general steepness of slope and the passage of feet combined with natural water erosion of the sands and chalk has produced these deep narrow lanes bounded by high banks. The tops of the hollow ways are often enclosed by ancient beech, yew and oak trees. Other country lanes are broad routes with wide verges the remnants of former commons and greens where roadside 'waste' was once utilised for grazing.

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