

Date: 12th September 2018
Report: Review of AONBs and National Parks and Governance
Written by: Rob Fairbanks, AONB Director

1. Purpose of Report

To advise the AONB Board on the Government Review of National Parks and AONBs and seek the Board's initial views on the issues and opportunities

To report on governance and the Risk Register, including the ability to coopt Members onto the AONB Board and Statutory Members Group.

2. Summary

A governance report is presented annually to the AONB Board as part of its AGM. It monitors the arrangements of the Surrey Hills AONB Board as a Joint Committee of local authorities as set out in its Constitution (2014 – 2019). This Constitution was adopted by the AONB Board and the local authorities along with the adoption of the AONB Management Plan and 5 year business plan (2014 – 2019). The Constitution was informed by a Surrey CC Finance and Governance Review and improvement Report (2014).

The review of the Constitution will initially be undertaken by the Statutory Review Group at its next meeting on 3rd December. This will include a review of the funding formulae, the role of the Chairmen's Group and the Surrey Hills Family Communications Group. In the meantime, the most significant development that will affect our arrangements is that earlier this year the Government published a 25-Year Plan for the Environment that made a commitment to undertake a Review of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).

3. Government Review of National Parks and AONBs.

In announcing the review, the Environment Secretary Michael Gove said "The creation of National Parks almost 70 years ago changed the way we view our precious landscapes – helping us all access and enjoy our natural world. Amid a growing population, changes in technology, and a decline in certain habitats, the time is right for us to look afresh at these landscapes. We want to make sure they are not only conserved, but enhanced for the next generation."

The Review is being led by Julian Glover, Guardian journalist and former speech writer for David Cameron. It is supported by an advisory group that has 6 members from a diverse range of countryside

interests and includes Dame Fiona Reynolds (formerly Director General of the National Trust) and Lord Cameron (formerly Chairman of the Countryside Agency and a past President of the CLA). The review will examine and make recommendations on:

- The existing statutory purposes for National Parks and AONBs and how effectively they are being met
- The alignment of these purposes with the goals set out in the 25-Year Plan for the Environment
- The case for extension or creation of new designated areas
- How to improve individual and collective governance of National Parks and AONBs, and how that governance interacts with other national assets
- The financing of National Parks and AONBs
- How to enhance the environment and biodiversity in existing designations
- How to build on the existing eight-point plan for National Parks and to connect more people with the natural environment from all sections of society and improve health and wellbeing
- How well National Parks and AONBs support communities

The Panel is currently familiarising itself with AONBs and National Parks including undertaking visits. There is expected to be a call for evidence in October to which all AONB and National Park authorities will be asked to submit information. The Panel's recommendations will be made to the Government and will be implemented by the Defra Secretary of State. The Review will report in 2019, as part of the 70th Anniversary of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act.

David Wright has written to Julian Glover inviting the Panel to visit the Surrey Hills and highlighting the issues that we would like to discuss. A copy of the letter is attached (Appendix 1). We are awaiting a response. The AONB Director will be meeting National Park and AONB Lead Officers in the South East region on 6th and 7th September and the National Association for AONBs has called a national meeting of AONB Lead Officers on 27th September. The ability to reach a consensus amongst the AONBs will be a major challenge, let alone getting agreement with the National Parks given the disparity in funding and profile.

The Statutory Members Group discussed the review on 3rd September. It noted that there was an opportunity to raise the profile of the Surrey Hills as a National Park, reflecting the high quality landscape and recreation pressures, but there was no appetite to create a new planning authority. Given the importance of the Review to the future of the Surrey Hills AONB, it was decided to allow enough time to discuss the issues and opportunities as part of the AGM.

As part of the 60th anniversary of the AONB designation, Surrey University will be hosting a Surrey Hills Symposium to 'celebrate, inspire and debate'. The theme for the debate is on new National Parks fit for the 21st Century. The symposium will take place on the evening of 28th November and will include national, regional and local contributions, followed by a debate. Max Lu, the Vice Chancellor, will be hosting a post-dinner event for speakers and civic guests. The event will be a key part of engaging people with the AONB Management Plan consultation and it is important that it is well attended and therefore needs the support of all AONB Board members and partner organisations. A copy of the outline programme is attached (see Appendix 2).

4. Risk Register.

The Risk Register was considered by the Statutory Members Group at its meeting on 3rd September. The Risk Register highlights what actions are undertaken to mitigate risks. Most of the scoring was Green which means that this should be subject to annual review but there are also areas (Amber) which need to be monitored by the AONB Director on a quarterly basis and reported to the Statutory Members Group,

as appropriate. Government funding was highlighted as a high risk in 2016 but the Government has confirmed that it will protect AONB funding until 2020.

The Statutory Members Group identified two new areas of risk that needed to be separately identified on the Register. Firstly, the pressure on local authority funding, including the financial pressures on Surrey CC as host authority. This will be considered further by the Group. The other issue was the loss of leadership due to local authority elections. The proposed mitigation is that there should be a succession plan, including a mandatory induction session with the Director and Chairman for new Members, and the ability to co-opt Members onto the SMG. This will be an interim measure, subject to the AONB Board, as a legal Local Authority Joint Committee, agreeing a new Constitution in 2019. A copy of the updated Risk Register is available on request.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- 1 To note progress with the Review of AONBs and National Parks, and to identify initial issues and opportunities for the Surrey Hills
2. To note the Risk Register and to agree that non-local authority Members can be elected onto the Statutory Members Group

Background papers:

- Surrey CC Governance and Audit, December 2014
- Surrey Hills AONB Constitution 2014 – 2019
- Surrey Hills AONB Board’s Strategic Business Plan (2014 – 2019)

Julian Glover
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

6th August 2018

Dear Julian,

Review of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Thank you very much for your letter giving the terms of your Review. At the Canterbury conference, you encouraged us all to send you our thoughts. What follows is a view from the Surrey Hills.

Introduction

Our environment is not natural, but man made. Its substantial economic, social and political value is due to human intervention which must be paid for mainly by landowners and farmers. Government 'top up' funding is delivered in diminishing amounts to designated agencies who generally work in silos. There is no coherent national countryside policy or plan. It will require dramatic intervention to ensure that the various countryside agencies are encouraged to act in unison and embrace a holistic approach to the management of the countryside. This should include the ability to measure the outputs of providers and the level of public usage in the context of fundamental objectives of provision of natural capital. This includes soil quality, flood prevention, water quality, the reduction of pesticides, the encouragement of wildlife, the preservation of distinct landscapes, the management of visitors, the provision of visitor facilities, the enhancement of the visitor offer, the encouragement of interest and engagement in the countryside. It also includes economic diversification, the creation of employment, controlled housing development. We need a sense of political urgency about the deteriorating condition of the countryside and recognition of the danger of doing nothing about it.

Our name and status.

As a brand name, the term AONB is misunderstood, mispronounced, and difficult to project in the minds of the general public. We need a new moniker. By contrast, the term National Park is instantly understood. Perhaps AONBs should be allowed to adopt the title without the formal underlying administrative superstructure and its cost implications. There may be room for two classes of National Park. Another snappier title may emerge.

Currently AONBs produce Management Plans, agreed by relevant local authorities but which are treated as advisory documents. A weightier document which carries a statutory requirement to implement its provisions would give AONBs some teeth and create the capacity to act as a vehicle to introduce and monitor a holistic approach to countryside management. At a minimum, AONBs should become statutory consultees on planning issues and on much else affecting countryside management.

Relevance to Public Health and Wellbeing

AONBs offer enormous public benefit. AONBs situated nearest to large metropolitan areas provide proportionately more benefit than those in more remote locations and their funding should reflect their higher visitor numbers. Visitors put their facilities under constant and unremitting pressure. The Surrey Hills enjoys some of the highest levels of walking, horse riding, off road and on road cycling in the country. Such AONBs need sources of funding in order to stand still in the task of preserving and maintaining their public offer.

To ensure their public benefit is experienced and enjoyed by as many varied user groups as possible, AONBs are tasked to educate, communicate, project their image, manage and create facilities, develop visitor themes and respond to public demand for new and imaginative visitor experiences. They do so at present mainly by cooperating with commercial partners and some agencies who have similar objectives. Equally important is their capacity to coordinate and inspire local authorities and engage their local communities in managing the enormous visitor and developmental pressures that their landscapes and their communities face.

Resourcing

The Surrey Hills has a total annual core budget of £180,000. This gross under-resourcing stimulates its resourcefulness, its willingness to collaborate, its efforts to forge partnerships, its inventiveness, lean working and close and collaborative contact with its local communities and Councils. Of late, its only regular source of project funding has been the HLF. This, together with Local Authority funding, is drying up. All sources of rural funding are scarce, for example, the total current annual County Council budget to maintain all Rights of Way in Surrey is £100,000. Countryside funding from general taxation seems to be a thing of the past.

The lean AONB model can however offer extremely good value for money using the little project funding it does receive. A lean administrative superstructure can be made to work. In the Surrey Hills this consists of 1x FTE CEO and 4 part-time staff.

Planning

The Local Plans of all five Surrey Hills Authorities firmly and consistently protect the AONB. Our part-time Planning Officer has developed strong and well cultivated relationships with Council planning departments and is able to comment authoritatively on strategically significant applications. This relatively light touch approach to AONB planning is generally cost effective. However recent Planning Inspector interventions have undermined Waverley Council's strongly protective AONB policies and insisted on development in the AONB. The cumulative impact of such decisions, nationally, must be considered.

Land Management

Government decisions on its choice of the funding formula to replace the single farm payment will have the most crucial impact on the long term preservation of our landscapes. Payment for measurable soil and landscape improvements, and payment for providing public facilities should become an integral element in holistic countryside management. The AONB could be an agent of both the creation of new clusters and the broad objectives of their projects, drawn up in support of the relevant AONB objectives as laid down in an enhanced and more prescriptive Management Plan based on a national agenda. If delivered by the rapid development of the cluster funding principle and run by those most intimately responsible for the countryside, eg the farmers and landowners, it would be transformative. It would be payment by results and not payment for obediently following operational formula with dubious relevance to local circumstances. It would probably become the major source of funding in the countryside. There would remain a need to fund the management of public use and enjoyment of the countryside including its promotion, the upkeep of rights of way and visitor facilities. This might best be addressed by centralised project funding similar but less bureaucratic and prescriptive than the current EU formulae. AONB Management Plans could become the local delivery vehicle for such funding, working in close partnership with the cluster managers and reflecting locally generated priorities.

The Surrey Hills.

It should be made clear that our AONB family has made considerable efforts to diversify our funding and expand our resource base to deliver the vision laid out in our existing Management Plan. We have created a Surrey Hills Society (a volunteer membership organisation), a Surrey Hills Enterprises CIC (tasked with generating income, undertaking rural projects and stimulating rural enterprise and diversification) and a Surrey Hills Trust Fund (to provide a long term source of project funding). I enclose a bulletin highlighting the recent work of our family.

On behalf of our Board, I invite you to visit the Surrey Hills to hear of our experience at first hand in this our 60th Anniversary Year. Situated on London's doorstep, we believe we offer a universal example of how our precious landscapes struggle to survive and how our tenuous rural communal life is overwhelmed by visitors, developmental pressure, traffic, poor infrastructure, a need for economic diversification, high land, property and labour costs, dying villages and a struggling ecology and biodiversity. Our natural environment remains beautiful but it deserves better and more intelligent joined up management. The current AONB model is inadequate to achieve this.

Yours sincerely



David Wright
Chairman

The Surrey Hills was one of the first landscapes to be designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1958. It is now one of 35 AONBs in England having equal landscape status to a National Park. The Surrey Hills AONB stretches across rural Surrey, covering about a quarter of the county.

The Surrey Hills Board was established in 2008 as a Joint Management Committee to develop policies and programmes that:

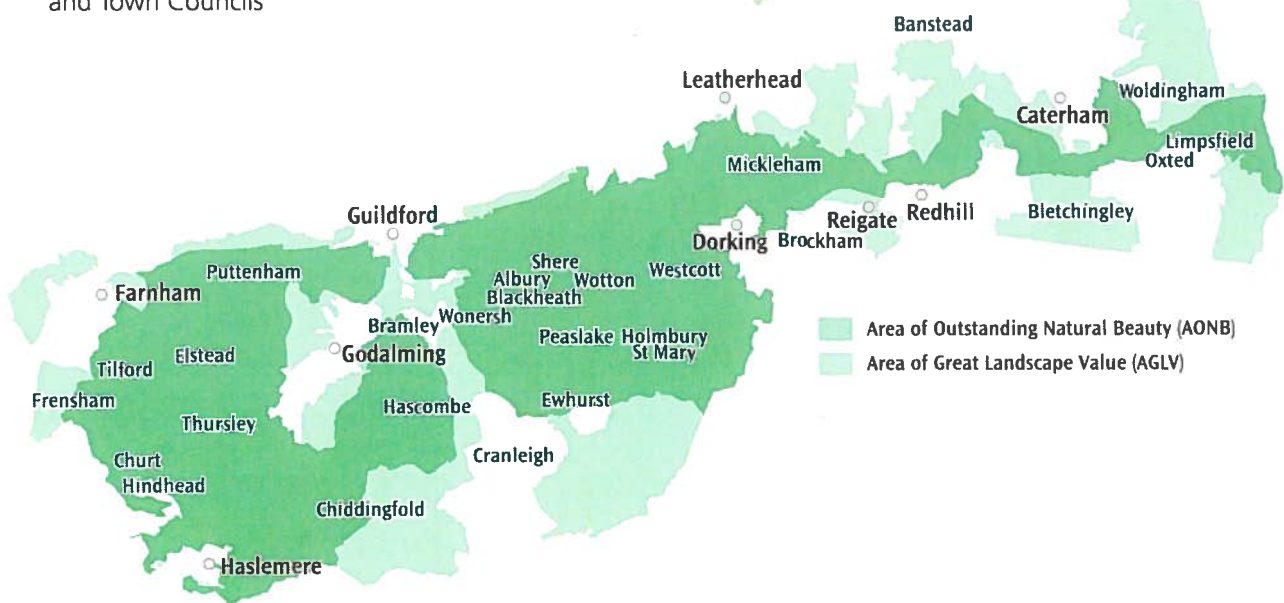
- Protect and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the Surrey Hills
- Enhance public understanding and enjoyment of the area
- Promote the social and economic well being of the Surrey Hills, particularly in regard to achieving the above objectives.

The Core Members funding the Surrey Hills Board are:

- Guildford Borough Council
- Mole Valley District Council
- Reigate and Banstead Borough Council
- Tandridge District Council
- Surrey County Council
- Waverley Borough Council
- Natural England
- The National Trust

The Advisory Members (non funding) are:

- National Farmers Union
- Country Land and Business Association
- Surrey Wildlife Trust
- CPRE Surrey
- Surrey County Association of Parish and Town Councils





The University of Surrey Symposium

The Surrey Hills

An evening of celebration, inspiration and debate

– a new National Park for the 21st Century?

On Wednesday, 28th November

at the University of Surrey, Rik Medlik Building

PART 1. Celebration and Inspiration

5.45 Registration and exhibition area to celebrate and inspire. This could include:

- Surrey Hills Arts installations, video, music
- Surrey Hills Enterprises drink and artisan products (Silent Pool gin, wine, artisan bakery)
- Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan consultation – what inspires people about the Surrey Hills (Inspiring Views?)

PART 2. The Debate: A new National Park for the 21st Century?

6.30 Welcome, Professor Max Lu, Vice Chancellor

6.35 Setting the Scene, David Wright, Chairman of the Surrey Hills Board

Celebrating the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty,

Video presentation and introduction to the debate

6.40 The Surrey Hills: A New National Park for the 21st Century?



Contributors:

National: Setting out a new vision for National Parks and the Surrey Hills AONB

Merrick Denton Thompson, President of the Landscape Institute

Regional: The Surrey Hills and the London National Park City,

Daniel Raven-Ellison, Campaigner and Founder

Local: A living and working countryside

Hugh Broom, Farmer and Surrey NFU

Artist visualisation

Created during the presentation and discussion

7.00 The Panel Debate

Panel to include the 'advocates' and experts to verify and appraise the trends and evidence.

- Professor Caroline Scarles
- Professor Tim Jackson
- Sarah Jane Chimbwandira

Chair to take questions from the audience. Set up framework questions to cover:

- climate change; future land management (Surrey Wildlife Trust, Nigel Davenport?)
- natural capital investment (Surrey Nature Partnership, Paul Wickham?)
- tourism (Visit Surrey – Chris Howard?)
- business development (EM3, SH Enterprises Mark Lebus?)
- Development pressure, London expansion (CPRE, Kristina Kenworthy)

8.00 Chair's Closing Remarks

Highlighting the AONB Management Plan consultation

Depart (and goody bag?) and close down exhibition area

Audience (about 300):

Politicians (parish, borough and county councillors), students, academics, public servants, press, amenity societies (Surrey Hills Society, CPRE, Guildford Environment Forum, FoE), business (Chamber of Commerce, Visit Surrey, Surrey Hills Enterprises); landowners and farmers; and other interested public