



Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Board

22nd June 2021

Making Space for Nature - Nature Recovery Strategy and the new Farming in Protected Landscapes programme

Purpose of the report:

To advise members of the work on developing a farmer and land manager led approach to nature recovery in the Surrey Hills and to outline the new Defra funded Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

1. Members note the work on the Nature Recovery Strategy and support its promotion, as appropriate
2. Members note the funding and management arrangements for the Farming in Protected Landscapes fund and advise on what outcomes should be prioritised in the Surrey Hills.

Introduction:

3. In response to declarations of Climate Emergency and our work on helping to design the new Environment Land Management Scheme (ELMS), the Surrey Hills AONB Board has been developing a nature recovery strategy that supports landowners, farm businesses and conservation bodies as the custodians of the habitats and environment of the Surrey Hills,
4. The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. The vision and policies in the Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan (2020 – 2025) acknowledge and respond to a

range of priorities including agriculture, woodland, hedgerows and trees, biodiversity and water resources and recreation, health and wellbeing, among others. Collectively the Colchester Declaration 2019 is the National Association for AONB's Declaration on Nature in AONBs to demonstrate readiness to reverse declines in species and habitats within the context of a wider response to climate change.

<https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/projects/colchester-declaration>

5. As a development of the work on ELMS as part of Defra's Agricultural Transition Plan, Defra is introducing the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme for National Parks and AONBs as special and unique places that support a huge range of habitats and species, which are enjoyed by millions of people every year. By supporting the farmers, land managers and people who live and work in these areas, the new programme is designed to help protect these exceptional places and support our local communities and visitors.
6. In the Surrey Hills AONB, the AONB team will be awarding £438k between now and the end of March 2022. The allocation for 2022/23 and 2023/24 is likely to be around £350k pa.

Making Space for Nature – Nature Recovery Strategy for the Surrey Hills

7. The Surrey Hills was one of 11 AONBs that worked together in 2020 as part of the largest Defra Test & Trial project to help design the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme. Each project focused on a different theme. The Surrey Hills was about designing a farmer and landowner led approach on how ELMS could deliver nature recovery on a landscape scale
8. Many land managers participated in this project through a set of eight workshops that provided an opportunity to discuss and feedback on how the new ELM scheme should run, balancing nature recovery with access and the funding of land management activities. This work enabled members from all three Facilitation Fund groups that the AONB supports to discuss topics across the Surrey Hills and developing this relationship through the groups is at the heart of the strategy.
9. The strategy identified seven habitats that are important within the Surrey Hills. For each habitat, the land managers selected a number of key species as an indicator of a healthy habitat. In turn managing the habitat for these key species will be beneficial in supporting a wide range of other species, as well as delivering a range of public goods like good soil health and clean water. Choosing the habitats and species was a joint effort between landowners/managers, local ecology and land management advisors and environmental organisations. They are:

Woodland and scrub

Nightingale	Purple emperor	Barbastelle bat	Silver-washed fritillary	Marsh Tit
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Heathland				
Dartford warbler	Grayling	Nightjar	Cross-leaved heath	

Chalk downland				
Small blue	Horseshoe vetch	Bee orchid	Salad burnet	

Arable				
Harvest mouse	Yellowhammer	Grey partridge	Corn Spurrey	Common Fumitory

Pasture				
Lapwing	Skylark	Bumblebees (as group)	Small copper	

Hedgerow				
Hazel dormouse	Brown hairstreak	Turtle dove	Barn owl	

Water				
Great-crested newt	Dragonflies/damselflies	Kingfisher	Water voles	

10. Existing information about our selected species was gathered from a wide range of local and regional organisations and has been prepared as maps for us by Ordnance Survey. Our indicator species vary in status, distribution, and abundance. As well as being an indicator of healthy habitats, species that resonate with us as landowners and managers

were selected. Some species, such as silver-washed fritillary are relatively common. Others such as the water vole, which hasn't been recorded in Surrey for several decades, may prove more challenging for landowners and managers.

11. Whilst a set of indicator species is helpful for guiding our approach to nature recovery, our land managers do not want to be limited by strategically allocated target areas that restrict their ability to understand and respond to the actual situation on the ground.
12. The Making Space for Nature Strategy will set out the framework for the activities to deliver nature recovery through collaboration, with the appropriate advice and support to deliver it. The Strategy will be launched in July as part of the launch of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme as this will be a major opportunity to turn the strategy into action.

Farming in Protected Landscapes programme

13. The Defra-funded Farming in Protected Landscapes programme will be open for applications from July 2021. It will run until March 2024.
14. Through the programme, farmers and land managers can be supported to carry out projects that support nature recovery, mitigate the impacts of climate change, provide opportunities for people to discover, enjoy and understand the landscape and cultural heritage, or support nature-friendly, sustainable farm businesses. This is a programme of funding for one-off projects covering these areas of work; it is not an agri-environment scheme.
15. It will be open to all farmers and land managers (including from the private, public and charity sector) in the AONB. Other organisations and individuals can apply, as long as they do this in collaboration with a farmer or land manager, or in support of a farmer or group of farmers. Common land is eligible for support through the Programme and a landowner can apply individually or a group of commoners acting together.
16. The programme supports activity on any land within the Surrey Hills. It can also support activity on other land where projects can demonstrate benefit to the Surrey Hills, or the Surrey Hills AONB Board's objectives or partnership initiatives. Most of the funding is expected to be provided for projects within the AONB boundary.
17. The Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme will pay for projects that provide value for money and meet at least one of the outcomes listed below, under four themes.

Climate outcomes

- More carbon is stored and/or sequestered
- Flood risk is reduced

- Farmers, land managers and the public better understand what different habitats and land uses can store carbon and reduce carbon emissions
- The landscape is more resilient to climate change

Nature outcomes

- There is a greater area of habitat improved for biodiversity
- There is an increase in biodiversity
- There is greater connectivity between habitats
- Existing habitat is better managed

People outcomes

- There are more opportunities for people to explore, enjoy and understand the landscape
- There are more opportunities for more diverse audiences to explore, enjoy and understand the landscape
- There is greater public engagement in land management, such as through volunteering
- Farmers and land managers feel increasingly comfortable with providing public goods

Place outcomes

- The quality and character of the Surrey Hills is reinforced or enhanced
- Historic structures and features are conserved, enhanced or interpreted more effectively
- There is an increase in farm business resilience

18. Example of projects in the Surrey Hills that could be supported include:

- Habitat management targeting species recovery, as identified in the Making Space for Nature Strategy
- Re-wiggling a straightened watercourse, for the biodiversity and natural flood management benefits this can bring
- Replacing stiles with gates on public footpaths to promote easier access
- Creating wader scrapes, or creating ponds to support a variety of wildlife
- Promoting connectivity between habitats
- Creating and promoting a series of farm walks across a cluster of farms, providing new access opportunities, links to the rights of way

network and interpretation of farming and of the natural and historic features on the land

- Conserving historic features on a farm, such as lime kilns and military heritage
 - Parking improvements at a key site provide safe access to popular walking routes and reduces congestion for visitors and for local residents
 - pop-up camping facility, alongside the provision of new walking trails and on-site activities, including e.g. firepit and stargazing sessions
 - Supporting Surrey Hills branded food initiatives which promotes the links between the product and the landscape in which it is produced
 - Re-wilding an area of land and promoting natural processes
 - Action to reduce carbon emissions on farms and estates
 - Whole farm planning for conservation, energy efficiency and economic resilience, including in farmer clusters
 - Gathering data and evidence to help inform conservation and farming practice
 - Accessing farm business advice
 - Working with new audiences to enable them to experience the Surrey Hills AONB
19. If an applicant will not make a commercial gain through a project, they could receive up to 100% of the costs. Where an applicant would benefit commercially from a project, they could receive between 40% and 80% of the costs through the Programme, depending on how much commercial benefit the project will give them.
20. Capital infrastructure assets (including, but not limited to, fences, gates, building restoration), should be maintained for 5 years from the date of completion. Machinery assets (for example a brush harvester for grassland restoration) should be maintained for 5 years from the date of purchase. The requirement to maintain natural, cultural and access activities (for example, management of grassland, restoration of a limekiln) delivered as part of programme will cease no later than 1 April 2024. More detail on this will be made available in the National Framework that Defra will be issuing.
21. The Surrey Hills AONB will need to use some of the Defra funding to help promote and coordinate bids with the recruitment of a Making Space for Nature Lead. This will be the point of contact for potential applicants who will be encouraged to contact the Surrey Hills AONB office to discuss the application.
22. There will be a standard application form. Applications for the first year of Programme funding should be made between 1st July 2021 and 31st January 2022. We will be able to consider applications for funding in year 2, especially if they aim to begin early in the financial year. Multi-year awards are possible for longer projects. All projects must end by March 2024.
23. Applications for over £5000 will be judged by a Local Assessment Panel. This kind of system has been used locally before for the Surrey Hills

‘Sustainable Development Fund’ and the LEADER programme. The Local Assessment Panel will be made up of 8 to 12 people. It will include representatives from the Surrey Hills AONB team, Natural England, representatives from the farming and land management community, and access and conservation advisers. It is expected that the panel will meet to make decisions every 6 to 8 weeks. Applications for less than £5000 will be decided upon by the AONB Director, where there is no financial conflict of interest and where the project is in line with the criteria with advice sought by members of the Panel, as appropriate.

Conclusions:

24. The Making space for Nature Strategy and the investment in the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme represents a significant investment in building our relationship with land managers and to deliver on the AONB Management Plan as part of a national programme.

Financial and value for money implications

25. Of the £438.302 allocation for 21/22 is: £438,302, a maximum of £34,000 may be spent on admin, and a maximum of £59,000 may be spent on advice and guidance. This represents major external investment without the requirement for local match funding

Equalities and Diversity Implications

26. None

Risk Management Implications

27. The AONB team will need to use the investment to ensure it has the appropriate capacity and competencies to deliver the programme.

Next steps:

The AONB team will, on behalf of our land managers, be publishing the Making Pace for Nature Strategy in July along with the launch of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and recruitment the capacity to promote and manage the programme.

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Background papers:

Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan (2020 – 2025)