



Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Board

1 September 2021

Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan Monitoring Report

Purpose of the report:

To update Members on the activities related to the implementation of the Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan (2020 – 2025).

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

1. Members note the activities of the Surrey Hills Family and partners in delivering the AONB Management Plan (2020 – 2025).

Introduction:

2. Although the fundamental purpose of the Management Plan is to encourage co-ordinated action by all organisations, agencies and individuals, the Surrey Hills AONB Board has established a Surrey Hills group of organisations (the Surrey Hills Family) to help support the delivery of the AONB Management Plan's Vision:

The Surrey Hills AONB is recognised as a national asset in which its natural and cultural assets are managed in an attractive landscape mosaic of farmland, woodland, heaths, downs, and commons. It provides opportunities for business enterprise and for all to enjoy and appreciate its natural beauty for their health and well-being.

3. This report provides an overview on progress under the following Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan pillars:

- Planning
 - Landscape Conservation and Enhancement
 - Access, Enjoyment and Understanding
 - Growing the Surrey Hills Economy
 - Advocacy. Partnership and Coordination
4. The Surrey Hills Family framework (Appendix 1) is work in progress to monitor the delivery. This will be reported to the AONB Board and reviewed by Surrey Hills Chairs' Group.

Planning

5. **AONB Boundary Review.** In June there was a Ministerial announcement confirming that Natural England would embark on a study to consider the extension of the Surrey Hills AONB. Natural England is in the process of commissioning consultants to engage the community to develop the evidence base and identify an area that Natural England could consider to be the basis for the statutory consultation. The consultants should be in place by 13 September. The project will be supported by a Technical Advisory Group comprised of officers from our constituent local authorities. Between 3 to 5 August, Natural England officers undertook a tour of Surrey to help determine the area of search, which was supported by the AONB Director, Planning Adviser, planning officers and with a special thanks to Tandridge Councillors Geoff Duck and George Dennis.
6. **Planning.** Although the level of consultations on development proposals continues to be high, there are currently no major development proposals in the Surrey Hills. There is still concern regarding the sale of land into small plots at Wanborough, which demonstrates the importance of maintaining the integrity of farms and estates.

Landscape Conservation and Enhancement

7. **Nature Recovery Strategy – Making Space for Nature.** The ELMS Test and Trail has developed a land manager and farmer led approach to nature recovery. This will be the basis of delivering the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and will be launched prior to the AGM.
8. **Farming in Protected Landscapes.** I am delighted to announce that Sarah Thiele is joining the Surrey Hills team to lead on the delivery of the Surrey Hills Farming in Protected Landscapes Fund. Sarah has extensive background knowledge in landscape, rural business and access issues, having recently worked on the Rural Surrey Leader programme. The first meeting on the Local Assessment Panel has been arranged for 1 September prior to the AGM.

9. **Land Manager Clusters.** The Surrey Hills contracts facilitators for three cluster schemes, funded under the Defra Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Scheme, which are the North Downs, Greenscapes, and West Surrey Greensands. The funding has been extended until 2022 and a priority is to extend the membership, particularly of the North Downs group towards the east Surrey Hills. The facilitators have organised the following training programmes which will include opportunities for identifying projects for the Farming in Protected Landscapes Fund in September:
1. **Hedgerows and connectivity.**
 2. **Woodland creation and improvement.**
 3. **Pond restoration and creation**
 4. **Wildlife houses** - bird, bat and dormice boxes and bug hotels
 5. **Pollinators and meadow creation**
 6. **Habitat, species and data assessments**
 7. **Water vole reintroduction feasibility**
10. **Network Rail Lineside Habitat Action Plan.** The AONB Board is developing plans with Network Rail on working with adjacent landowners to map, plan and coordinate land management investment. Plans are being developed as a pilot with key landowners between Guildford and Reigate, include the possibility of communities getting involved with the management of some Network Rail sites.
11. **Surrey Hills Society Volunteer Coordinator.** The Surrey Hills Society has recruited Christa Emmett, who will take up her position in October. The role is to advise and support the coordination of volunteers to take practical action that improves biodiversity and access across the Surrey Hills AONB, including supporting the Surrey Hills Champions scheme. Funding was secured through the Community Foundation for Surrey and the AONB Board is making a £5k contribution. Christa will be based at the Surrey Hills Estate Office and the Surrey Wildlife Trust HQ. We very much look forward to welcoming Christa to the Surrey Hills family.

Access, Enjoyment and Understanding

12. **Surrey Hills Website.** As reported under the Governance and Finance report, the existing website is not fit for purpose in terms of coping with the volume of traffic and providing effective information to visitors. The development of a new website is now business critical. Working in partnership with Surrey Hills Enterprises, a brief was written, there were four tenders with one preferred supplier. We are now seeking funding to proceed and work with local authorities to identify budget and resources for a Spring 2022 launch. The new website will include a better visitor offering and community hub element, as well as supporting major projects like the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.
13. **Rail to Ramble.** The Surrey Hills Society has led in partnership with the South East Communities Rail Partnership on the production four new walking routes, promoting walking between railway stations along the North Downs line. This new Rail to Ramble project covers the stations between Guildford and Betchworth; it was launched on 29 June and

Great Western Rail has been promoting the campaign throughout their network.

14. **Community Rail.** The Surrey Hills to South Downs Community Rail Partnership have recently launched their new website <https://hills2downs.org.uk/>, with information about the villages and landscapes connected via the railway line. The partnership works with South Western Railway and the Community Rail network to deliver projects and initiatives that link the line with local communities and the surrounding landscapes of the Surrey Hills and South Downs National Park. A Line Guide has also been created and designed in collaboration with all partners. [Click here to download the guide.](#)
15. **Surrey Strategic Greenway Strategy.** The Leith Hill Greenway project will be launched at Denbies on Thursday 23rd September. The key message is about the Greenway being a new multi-user route providing greater access for all. There will be short statements from walkers, runners, cyclists and equestrians about being considerate, sharing with care and linking to the `Be Nice Say Hi` campaign. One development is that Surrey CC has now consulted whether there should be a Traffic Regulation Order for the Wolvern's Lane stretch. The option for a permanent ban on motorised vehicles was supported by the AONB Board and will be considered by the Mole Valley Local Committee at the end of September.
16. **PR.** A new PR schedule has been created so that Surrey Hills stories from across the Surrey Hills family are regularly issued to the press. Recent stories have had widespread media attention, including TV and radio and the announcement of the Boundary Expansion project; the 10th anniversary of the Hindhead A3 Tunnel Scheme and the damage done by off-road vehicles. These significantly raised the profile of Surrey Hills and the role of the family and our partners.
17. **Surrey Hills Society.** The Society has published its autumn newsletter that is themed on the Second World War. Over 20 events are planned between September and December of which 11 are walks for the Guildford Walkfest in September.
18. **Heathland Artworks.** This annual exhibition in partnership with UCA and the RSPB was launched on 24 June at RSPB Farnham Heath and there have been guided walks with targeted groups over the Summer. The exhibition will continue until 31 October. For more information see: [Heathland Artworks Trail - Surrey Hills Arts](#)
19. **Inspiring Views.** Radius by James Tunnard launched on 30 June at Denbies Hillside. James has run workshops on making wildlife habitats with people at the Patchworking Garden with a great response. We have connected the North Downs Way to this site at Denbies hillside and had a wheelchair friendly slope installed. A podcast has been made of this project and the film will be launched soon. Together with a series of walks all is on the project webpage: [Radius - Surrey Hills Arts](#)

20. **Habitat.** This project seeks to green urban areas and install sculptural habitats working with artists, ecologists and the community. After an unsuccessful Arts Council application, we are now working with the Surrey Hills Society to apply to Your Fund Surrey. The pilot project partners the University of Surrey and Surrey Wildlife Trust. The project can be supported by giving it the thumbs up at: [Follow The Discussion – Your Fund Surrey - Ideas Map – Commonplace](#)
21. **Footprints.** Storyteller Jon Mason researched the history of Hindhead, Frensham and Hascombe Hill. Going back as far as the Iron Age, Jon has created a series of podcasts that reveals the varied history and folklore of the landscape. There were two live story telling performances at Frensham on the 23 July and Hindhead on the 29 July as part of the Surrey Archaeology Festival. QR codes are now being installed for self-guided walks, see [Footprints - stories of Hindhead's past - Surrey Hills Arts](#)
22. **Social Media.** The Surrey Hills family continue to use their individual social media channels to share information about all aspects of their work. We encourage you to engage with us on social media.

Family Member	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram
Surrey Hills AONB	7,519	6,128	3,660
Surrey Hills Enterprises	1,065	N/a	3,020
Surrey Hills Society	280	561	1,455
Surrey Hills Arts	N/a	N/a	2,863

Growing the Surrey Hills Economy

23. **Surrey Hills Artisan Festival.** This was organised by Surrey Hills Enterprises on Saturday 3 and Sunday 4 July at Denbies in partnership with Surrey Arts and Surrey Artists Open Studios. It attracted around 2,500 visitors and showcased Surrey Hills food, drink, arts and crafts and was sponsored by Saffery Read.
24. **Surrey Hills Sustainable Business Conference.** The conference is being organised by Surrey Hills Enterprises to inspire businesses to become more sustainable. It will be held on Friday 22 Oct (postponed from 16 July due to Covid restrictions) and generously hosted by Pennyhill Park Hotel. Presentations will be from a range of speakers, including Michael Gove as keynote speaker on climate change; Surrey Hills Enterprises Members; Enterprise M3 and the Institute of Directors. AONB Board Member Marisa Heath will speak on the Greener Futures. For more information see: www.surreyhills.org/events/surreyhillssustainabilityconference/
25. **The Guide to Surrey Hills.** This is a new guide to showcase the Surrey Hills and the range of events, activities, local produce, experiences and services within the Surrey Hills. The guide will be available for distribution in September.

Surrey Hills Enterprises has secured sponsorship from Squires Garden Centres and will be printing and distributing the guide in September as part of its Surrey Hills DMO work.

26. **Surrey Hills Artisan Markets.** A new Surrey Hills Artisan Market has been set up working in partnership with Cranleigh Chamber of Commerce. The aim is to both support our Surrey Hills Artisans and to support the high street. The markets are the first Saturday of the month and the next dates are on 2 October, 6 November and 4 December 2021.

In addition, Surrey Hills Enterprises now has a permanent position at the Guildford Farmers Market to enable two Surrey Hills businesses to be showcased each month.

27. **Surrey Hills Champions.** This is a new initiative to inspire and engage more people to support local sustainable businesses in the Surrey Hills and their products, activities and experiences. It also supports nature recovery in the Surrey Hills working in partnership with the Surrey Hills Society, with a focus a low carbon economy. It is a key part of developing the customer base for Surrey Hills Enterprises new DMO Programme and sponsored by Squires Garden Centres and EM3.
28. **Green Growth Recovery Fund - `Rail to Trail`.** The Conservation Volunteers (formerly BTCV) submitted a bid for circa £450k to the Green Growth Recovery Fund, partnering with the High Weald, Kent Downs and Surrey Hills AONBs. Unfortunately, the project did not receive a grant offer, but the partners are keen to review the feedback with a view to resubmitting.

Advocacy. Partnership and Coordination

29. **AONB Staffing.** Caroline Price's left over the summer after 17 years with the Surrey Hills AONB to take up a new position within Surrey County Council. We thank Caroline for all her outstanding dedication over the years and wish her all the best in her new role. I am delighted to announce that Emma Cole will be taking up the position as Surrey Hills Communications Lead on 11 October. Emma previously had work experience with the Surrey Hills team; has since worked in a corporate graduate programme and is currently a marketing campaigns officer at The Royal Holloway. Denise Furlonger is moving into a new business support role (Finance and Grants) within Surrey County Council but will still deal with core AONB and Farming in Protected Landscapes matters. Denise's time will be charged back to the Surrey Hills to cover this work. We look forward to continuing to work with Denise as part of the team in her new role.
30. **Glover Review.** The formal response from Government to the Glover Review of National Parks and AONBs that was published on 21 September 2019 is expected imminently.
31. **Annual Partnership Tour.** On Friday 2 July, members of the Surrey Hills AONB Board and wider partnership visited Newlands Corner and West Horsley Place to look at issues related to the AONB boundary review, heritage conservation, national trails, nature based therapies, tree health, Inspiring Views, tourism, land management, nature recovery;

rural enterprise and tourism. The feedback from participants was very positive (rated 4.5 out of 5) as both a networking and learning event. The main issues to note were:

1. **Newlands Corner.** Katie MacDonald, Surrey CC Natural Capital Group Manager, outlined the new management arrangements and branding for the Countryside Estate and outlined the opportunity to welcome, educate and inspire new and younger audiences through the Discovery Centre and planned nature play area.
2. **Yew Tree Health.** Geoff Monck of Guildford BC spoke about the national importance of the yew trees on the Merrow and Albury Downs. He outlined the concerns about tree health and the research and it was agreed that the Surrey Hills AONB should try to support this through the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme.
3. **Nature Based Therapy.** Gary Evans, Director of the Forest Bathing Institute, outlined the evidence of ancient woodlands in addressing simple and complex physiological (immunology) and psychological health issues. The need for clinical research was discussed in order to establish a core robust evidence base. It was agreed that the Surrey Hills AONB should try to support the extension of this in the Surrey Hills through the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme and the Surrey Heartlands Green Prescription pilot.
4. **Mountain biking.** Rob Fairbanks outlined the growth in wild trails and the work with Cycling UK and key landowners, including the Forestry Commission, National Trust, Surrey County Council and the Friends of the Hurtwood to understand the issues and discuss possible solutions. He outlined the plan to develop an area wide policy based on the Forestry Commission guidelines and a voluntary 'trail guardian' idea to manage a network of sanctioned trails.
5. **North Downs Way.** Peter Morris, National Trail Manager, gave an update on the Experience Project to encourage year-round tourism and the development of Trail Ambassadors. The dangerous A25 crossing was noted, which is a constraint to people exploring the wider area.
6. **Inspiring Views.** Ali Clarke, Surrey Hills Arts Programme Manager, introduced Octahedron, the new seat installation off the North Downs Way by Will Nash, who also created the Swift Tower at Shalford. Ali gave a background to the programme, the planning, enhancing access, outreach work and the creation of the view and open habitat with Butterfly Conservation.
7. **Conservation Management.** Bill Downy of Butterfly Conservation highlighted the work on the Inspiring View and outlined the international importance of the chalk downland for butterflies. He gave some very frank feedback about the decline in the management of the grasslands and the resultant decline in butterfly populations, which need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. It was agreed to convene a site meeting with the Albury Estate and to look at funding support through the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme.
8. **West Horsley Place.** Ben Pearce, Director, outlined the background and ambitions of the Trust in managing the Estate. They were keen to work with the Surrey Hills as a centre for the arts and heritage, and were working with Surrey Hills Enterprises members on catering and hosting

an artisan festival. A sustainable Surrey Hills lunch was provided by Ian Jones of Hill House Farm, but unfortunately Ian was unable to join us because of a dog attack on his sheep that he had to deal with.

9. **Boundary Extension Project.** Heather Kerswell and Stephen Rudd, Natural England, outlined the governance, programme and evidence base for the review of the Surrey Hills AONB, outlining the potential area of search. West Horsley parish councillor, Tony Rogers, spoke about the importance of the AONB extension and how the parish council wanted to be engaged in the Surrey Hills.
10. **Making Space for Nature.** Amy Hammond, Lantern and farm cluster facilitator, outlined the work on the Defra Environmental Land Management Test and Trail, that has developed the landowner and farmer led nature recovery strategy. Rob Fairbanks highlighted the Farming in Protected Landscapes funding that will provide an opportunity to work with the clusters on delivering nature recovery projects. Mike Waites, Surrey Wildlife Trust, led a walk around the West Horsley Estate providing an expert view on its natural heritage and habitat projects.
32. **Surrey Hills Community Forum.** In partnership with SALC, over 100 people representing various parish councils and community groups attended this online event on 29 July. There was an update on the AONB Boundary Extension and the work of the Surrey Hills AONB Board. Much of the discussion and questions highlighted concern about the volume of visitors to the Surrey Hills and their impact on the landscape and local communities, particularly off-road sportive cycle events. The overall feedback was positive (rated 4.3 out of 5) with 100% of survey respondents stating that they would like to attend a future forum either in person or online.
33. **Surrey Hills Wood Fair.** Surrey Hills Enterprises is again organising the Wood Fair over the weekend of 11 and 12 September at the Cranleigh Show Ground. This is a major public showcasing event for the Surrey Hills, which is the most wooded National Park or AONB in the country with 40% woodland cover. All members are requested to please help to promote and support the event, including any offers of volunteering. We will be using this to help promote the Farming in Protected Landscapes project and will be inviting landowners and farmers with a complimentary ticket to find out more information. There will be in a Making Space for Nature section that will provide talks and practical demonstrations on what communities can do to support nature recovery.
34. **Surrey Hills Symposium.** Our annual symposium at Surrey University is being planned for Wednesday 24 November. The theme is 'Our Climate and Biodiversity Emergency – how can we inspire action'. It will be hosted by the Vice Chancellor, Max Lu, and we have a range of great speakers, including the keynote speaker Partha Dasgupta on the economic of biodiversity. The BBC broadcaster Jim Al-Khalili will be chairing the panel debate. Earlier in the afternoon Surrey Hills Arts will be organising a workshop session with various leading environmental artists.

35. **The Prize to Transform the Future.** The Surrey Hills AONB Director is working with Dan Raven-Ellison, Founder of the National Park City Movement, OS and National Landscape colleagues to publish a map visualising what a wilder, greener, healthier and low carbon London City Region may look like. This will be published by OS with copies being sent to decision makers, including MPs, in advance of COP 26.

Conclusions:

36. By working in collaboration, the Surrey Hills AONB family manages to deliver across a broad agenda in pursuit of the agreed vision for the Surrey Hills.

Financial and value for money implications

37. The Surrey Hills AONB team delivers the above programme of work within its core budget. Collaborating through the Surrey Hills family and partners demonstrates a high level of success in securing additional resources.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

38. The diversity of the Surrey Hills activity provides a wide range of opportunities to engage residents, businesses, and wider communities to understand, access and enjoy the Surrey Hills.

Risk Management Implications

39. The key risks are identified in the Risk Register that is reported annually to the AONB Board's AGM and is based on reputational, performance, finance, and governance risks. This informs the delivery of the programme to mitigate risks as appropriate.

Next steps:

Members advice will help to inform the delivery of the AONB Management Plan.

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Sources/background papers:

- The Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan (2020 – 2025)
<https://www.surreyhills.org/board/our-management-plan/>