

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE

8 OCTOBER 2019

Title:

SURREY HILLS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY (AONB) MANAGEMENT PLAN 2020 - 2025

[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Macleod]

[Wards Affected: All wards except Farnham, Cranleigh and Godalming]

Summary and purpose:

The adoption of an up to date AONB Management Plan is a statutory requirement for those local authorities that are covered by the AONB. The current Management Plan is from 2014 to 2019. This report recommends approval of the revised Surrey Hills AONB Management, 2020 – 2025, following a 'light touch' review. The Management Plan has been prepared by the Surrey Hills AONB Board on behalf of, and in collaboration with, the five Surrey Hills AONB districts and boroughs and Surrey County Council.

How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Strategy:

The Management Plan deals with a number of issues relating to the management of the AONB including natural resource use, biodiversity, heritage, the appearance of an area, jobs, services and facilities; rural proofing and the rural economy. The Management Plan accords with new corporate strategy.

Equality and Diversity Implications:

There are no implications arising from this report. Disabled access to the AONB and the likelihood of ethnic minorities visiting the Surrey Hills AONB was raised at the Symposium held at Surrey University last November. However none of the policies in the review of the AONB Management Plan prevent these issues being addressed.

Resource/Value for Money implications:

It is not anticipated that the Council will have to contribute any more to implementing the Plan than the £ 5,279 it already contributes annually as a core funding partner of the Surrey Hills Board. DEFRA contributes the majority of the Surrey Hills Unit's running costs. The four other Districts and Surrey County Council fund the balance of the AONB Unit's core income.

Legal Implications:

The preparation of a Management Plan for the Surrey Hills AONB, and its review within five years, is a statutory requirement for local authorities under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The constitution for the Surrey Hills Board, as a Joint Management Committee, is to prepare and keep under review the Management Plan. However, it is for the constituent local authorities to independently adopt it. Local authorities are required to

have regard to the Management Plan and the purposes of the AONB in carrying out their functions.

Climate Change Implications:

The AONB Management Plan sets out policies for the sustainable management of the countryside. It seeks to balance development pressure, community development and conservation objectives. Paragraph 1.4 of the Management Plan promotes an 'ecosystems approach', which values the interrelationship between different natural resources from water to woodland, in line with the key goals set out in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan.

The review of the Management Plan has been subject to sustainability environmental assessment which assesses the aims and policies of the Plan against a number of indicators including climate change. The SA concludes that there is potential for adverse impacts on climate change as a result of development needed and changes in land management practices. However, it considers that specific measures to mitigate are best dealt with through the determination of planning applications under local plan policies. In terms of land management practices, mitigation is best achieved through the promotion and provision of information and advice about low carbon approaches to farming.

1.0 The Management Plan Review

- 1.1 Designated landscapes cover a significant proportion of Waverley. 77 % of the Borough is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and or area of Great landscape Value. Sections 89 and 90 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) require local authorities and conservation boards to produce AONB Management Plans that are covered by an AONB and to review adopted and published plans at intervals of not more than five years.
- 1.2 The first Management Plan for the Surrey Hills was produced by the Surrey Hills Board which was published in April 2004 to cover the period up to 2009. It was subsequently reviewed in 2009 and in 2014. The current plan runs to 2019 and therefore under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act it is required to be updated.

2.0 The Surrey Hills Board

- 2.1 The Surrey Hills AONB covers parts of Waverley Tandridge, Reigate and Banstead, Guildford and Mole Valley. In order to ensure that there is a coordinated approach to the conservation, enhancement and management of the AONB a Joint Advisory Committee was set up some years ago, known as the 'Surrey Hills Board'. The Board is made up of representatives of the constituent local authorities, including Surrey County Council, and partner organisations such as The National Trust and Surrey Wildlife Trust.
- 2.2 The AONB Board has sought over recent years to diversify its funding and resource base to help deliver the AONB Management Plan. This has created a Surrey Hills 'family' of organisations including the Surrey Hills Society (a membership charity), the Surrey Hills Trust Fund (raising funds for projects and established in partnership with the Community Foundation for Surrey) and the Surrey Hills Enterprises (a community interest company that promotes rural economic development and tourism).

- 2.3 The Board prepares the AONB Management Plan for the local authorities with assistance from officers from the AONB unit and the local authorities. However, responsibility for the Plan remains with the local authorities, and each one is required separately to adopt it. The purpose of this report is to explain the revised Management Plan, 2020-2025, the changes as a result of the review, and to recommend that it be approved.

3.0 AONB Boundary Review and Glover Review

- 3.1 The Review of the AONB Management Plan takes place within the context of two important pieces of work. The first is a long-promised review of the boundaries of the AONB to be undertaken by Natural England which may begin towards the end of this year or beginning of 2020. The outcome of the review could result in areas that are currently designated as AGLV being included within the AONB.
- 3.2 The second piece of work is the Government's review of protected landscapes, known as the Glover Review. The Review has just been published which makes some recommendations with regard to the funding, role and management of AONBs, including their role in the planning system. This Review does not affect the process of adopting the AONB Management Plan as it will be the Government's response to the Review that will provide any changes relating to governance, financing and the statutory purposes of AONBs. However, for this reason the Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan review is 'light touch' in approach until the Government's response to the Glover Review is clearer.

4.0 Preparation of the Review of the AONB Management Plan

- 4.1 In March 2019, the Surrey Hills Board agreed a draft of the Management Plan and is recommending its adoption by the constituent local authorities. This was the result of several months of work during which officers have reviewed the previous Management Plan and carried out targeted consultations.
- 4.2 Prior to the Management Plan review, the 60th anniversary of the Surrey Hills AONB designation was marked by a symposium at Surrey University. This looked at various themes including climate change and recreational pressures. The discussions were documented and helped to provide background information for the review. A series of videos under the title of 'My Surrey Hills' explored personal connections to the Surrey Hills and the values these individuals ascribed to the landscape. This helped to stimulate discussion on the role of landscape in people lives. Another strand to the consultations was an on-line survey which showed a high degree of support for existing Management Plan policies and for the Vision and Statement of Significance.
- 4.3 Part of the preparatory work for the review was a screening exercise to ensure that the policies in the review do not have a significant detrimental impact on the environment. Subsequently, Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment on the review of the Management Plan have been carried out.
- 4.4 The SEA has concluded that potential for adverse impacts is concentrated around those aspects of the Management Plan that would give rise to direct interventions in the landscape, in terms of changes in land management practices or changes to

built development, including the re-use of existing buildings and structures and the creation of new ones. For built development and changes of land use the planning system would provide the principal means of addressing the potential for harm that might arise from a given scheme. For land management practices and other activities that fall outside the remit of the planning system, any potential for harm would be addressed through best practice dissemination initiatives and schemes.

- 4.5 The HRA has concluded that implementation of the revised Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan is not likely, alone or in combination with other plans or development, to give rise to significant adverse impacts on the integrity of any of the SPAs or SACs covered by the assessment, subject to a minor change to the wording of Policy B1 to provide protection of the SPA and /or Ramsar Site. The text of Policy B1 has been amended to deal with this and now includes the wording *“The importance of designated sites and the need for their protection and management will be promoted to the wider AONB community through information and awareness campaigns.”*
- 4.6 Subject to the decisions of the AONB local authorities, the AONB Board will meet to agree arrangements for the publication and launch of the Management Plan towards the end of this year.
- 4.7 The policy context is provided by national policies contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Local Plan Part 1. In essence, these planning policies emphasise the importance of the conservation of the landscape character of the AONB, having regard also to the conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage. The purpose of the AONB Management Plan is to provide a context for the various initiatives that support the conservation and enhancement this nationally important landscape. A number of organisations will play a role in this alongside the local authorities. The Management Plan helps to unify the approach taken to a range of issues relating to landscape conservation, recreation and enjoyment of the AONB and community development.

5.0 Summary of Main Changes to the 2014 – 2019 Management Plan

- 5.1 A copy of the draft Management Plan 2020-2025 is attached as Annexe 1. Set out below is a summary of the amendments to the existing Management Plan. The changes have been made in order to update it and to ensure it responds to changing circumstances, the results of the consultation and the priorities of the local authority and other partners.
- 5.2 Section 1 - Introduction: there are minor changes which provide the overall context for the Plan.
- 5.3 Section 2 – The Policy Framework:
- the Statement of Significance and Vision have remained largely unchanged, reflecting the high degree of support for both during the consultation. There is specific mention now made to the health and well-being benefits of the landscape.
 - An opportunity has been taken to redraft the policies covering agriculture to make them simpler and more understandable without altering their emphasis. The policy on farm diversification has been amended to make it more responsive to creating opportunities to increase biodiversity.

- The coverage of woodlands has been expanded to include hedgerows and veteran trees. The policies have been amended slightly to improve readability and include reference to biosecurity in relation to disease control.
- Additional wording has been added to the wording of B1 to meet the recommendations of the HRA. The Biodiversity policy has also been amended to include water resources in recognition of the importance of wetland habitats. In the supporting text reference is made to the catchment partnerships and the work being undertaken to enhance the river catchments and meet Water Framework Directive targets. A second additional paragraph links to the section of the NPPF on biodiversity with its references to biodiversity net gain. A change to Policy B4 seeks biodiversity gains through the planning process.
- The Historic and Cultural policy area has been subject to very minor changes to improve readability.
- In relation to policies for Recreation and Tourism, the term 'Wellbeing' has been added to the title. Other revisions are minor with the exception of the removal of policies relating to sustainable tourism and development criteria for recreation enterprises which are now covered within the planning policies.
- In the policies on Planning, the main changes are to the supporting text to provide additional guidance on the landscaping of developments, developments resulting in the loss of agricultural land and external lighting.
- Transport policies remain unchanged but there is additional supporting text relating to schemes designed to declutter rural roads and the value of sensitive verge management to biodiversity objectives.
- The Development and the Local Economy policies have been retitled Economy, Tourism and Community Development. Policies have been made clearer with an emphasis on sustainable development, the promotion of local services and produce, affordable housing and community transport.

5.4 Section 3 – The Delivery Strategy:

- Some minor redrafting. It explains the role and function of the Surrey Hills 'family', the Surrey Hills Brand and the strategic targets underlying the Plan. Finally there is a section on monitoring which remains unchanged.

5.5 The Management Plan redrafting does not result in major changes to any of the policies or supporting text. Changes have been introduced to improve readability and to reflect recent initiatives in relation to biodiversity net gain, for example and previous omissions such as hedgerows.

6.0 Consideration of the changes

6.1 The review of the AONB Management Plan is 'light touch'. The main changes to the document have been a restructuring of the document to make it more concise and to remove any information that could be found in other documents. Most of the policies have been, unchanged or only slightly amended to make it clearer or to add a new emphasis.

6.2 The AONB Management Plan is a material planning consideration. However, the small changes means that there is no conflict between the AONB Management Plan and the adopted Local Plan Part 1.

7.0 Conclusion

7.1 The existing Management Plan is a document that can inform the development control process and has been the source of many enhancement projects in the AONB. It is an authoritative and comprehensive Plan for the AONB. The revised Management Plan, 2020-2025 will ensure that the management of the AONB continues successfully, and merits the full support of the Council.

Recommendation

That the Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan 2020-2025 be adopted as the statutory AONB Management Plan for Waverley Borough Council.

Background Papers

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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