

Agenda Item 6

Cabinet Member	Councillor Margaret Cooksey
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Date	16 September 2019

Wards affected	Bookham South; Fetcham East; Leatherhead South; Boxhill and Headley; Mickleham, Westhumble and Pixham; Westcott; Dorking North; Dorking South; Brockham, Betchworth and Buckland; Holmwoods; Okewood Hill; Leith Hill	Key Decision	Yes
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Subject	Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan 2020 -2025
Recommendations	
<p>(1) To adopt the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2020-25 (appendix 1).</p> <p>(2) To delegate any minor editing to the Executive Head of Service in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning.</p>	

Executive Summary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Management Plan for the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty has been reviewed as required under legislation. • The Plan is prepared jointly with other local authorities within the Surrey Hills. • Each authority is required to adopt it separately. • A 'light touch' has been chosen for the review with the main changes summarised in the report. • The Cabinet is requested to adopt the Management Plan 2020-2025 to meet statutory obligations.

Corporate Priority
<p>Environment</p> <p>A highly attractive area with housing that meets local need</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and enhance the natural and built environment and ensure our areas of natural beauty are well looked-after; • Work with other agencies to protect the District from the effects of climate change and environmental pollution, paying particular attention to flooding and air quality.
<p>Prosperity</p> <p>A vibrant local economy with thriving towns and villages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with rural communities and businesses to build on their unique strengths and address their challenges, helping them thrive and become more sustainable • Promote Mole Valley as a place for people to spend their leisure time and support local businesses to maximise opportunities from recreation and tourism
<p>Community Wellbeing</p> <p>Active communities and support for those who need it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote opportunities for residents of all ages to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives • Encourage participation in sports, leisure, cultural and educational activities, to promote responsible enjoyment of our parks, open spaces, heritage and countryside

The Cabinet has the authority to determine the recommendations

1.0 Background

1.1 Designated landscapes cover a significant proportion of the area of Mole Valley. 36% is Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), a nationally important landscape where great weight is given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty (National Planning Policy Framework). Overlying the AONB and areas on the fringe of the AONB is the Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV), which is a County-level designation indicating important landscape in its own right but of significance also as a protective buffer to the AONB.

1.2 Sections 89 and 90 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) require local authorities and conservation boards to produce AONB Management Plans and to review adopted and published plans at intervals of not more than five years. A new Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan will, therefore, need to be adopted by local authorities in 2019.

2.0 Surrey Hills Board

2.1 The Surrey Hills AONB also covers parts of the neighbouring boroughs and districts of Tandridge, Reigate and Banstead, Guildford and Waverley. 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. Mole Valley is currently represented by Councillor Hazel Watson. The Board has been chaired by one of the local authority core members but has decided to move towards an independent chair. The process of recruitment is now underway.

- 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 It is the Board that 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 plan, changes made to it in this review and obtain agreement to adopt it.

3.0 Policy Context

- 3.1 The policy context is provided by national policies contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and local policy provided in the case of Mole Valley by the Council's Core Strategy. 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. So far as the AGLV is concerned, it has a role in protecting the AONB from development just outside the AONB that could be harmful to it. The work to revise the Management Plan has also been considered during work on emerging Future Mole Valley Local Plan to ensure consistency in the way in which planning policies are applied to protected landscapes.
- 3.2 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. The policies are a material consideration in the determination of planning applications, complementing MVDC's own local plan policies. The Management Plan is also relevant to the Council's Rural Community Strategy and Economic Prosperity Strategy (see below), and there are complementary policies that encourage rural community development and rural enterprise. An annual monitoring report is produced that measures the objectives and targets of the Plan against the outcomes from initiatives being undertaken by the AONB Board and its partners. The Plan also has an important role in obtaining funding from central government and grant-giving organisations. They will want to understand how the work that they are supporting fits within an overall set of goals and that these are supported by communities within the AONB as well as by statutory and voluntary bodies and local businesses.

4.0 Relevance to MVDC's Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 In terms of MVDC's own Corporate Priorities, the Management Plan and the work of the Surrey Hills 'family' is a valuable delivery mechanism for the Council's own Corporate Priorities. For a plan that is predicated on the conservation of the landscape character of the AONB, there are obvious synergies with MVDC's Environmental Priority. Policies in the Management Plan pertaining to the natural environment fit well with MVDC's Priority which recognises that challenges need to be met by agencies working together.

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. This also reflects the thinking behind MVDC's Environment Priority which underlines the interrelationship between different elements of the natural environment, the negative impact that human activity on eco-systems and the need to counter air pollution and climate change generally.

- 4.2 However, over and above the environmental aspects of the Management Plan, there are important policies relating to promoting the vitality of local communities in ways that are sustainable. There are policies in the Plan that promote MVDC's Prosperity Priorities. Surrey Hills Enterprises, part of the Surrey Hills 'family' is one way in which local business can be supported and local skills and produce marketed so that the Surrey Hills remains a location for healthy communities. The Surrey Hills Wood Fair and the Surrey Hills Food and Drink Festival are two examples of how the commercial life of the area is being promoted by Surrey Hills Enterprises. In this way a range of services and employment can be retained in rural communities so that they are not just a dormitory for the few who can afford to live there. This is as much a part of the character of the countryside as the natural environment. This is a theme of MVDC's Rural Community Strategy and Economic Prosperity Strategies and there are clear and obvious links between the Surrey Hills Management Plan and both of these strategies.
- 4.3 Finally, under the heading of MVDC's priorities, there is the Community Wellbeing Priority. The Surrey Hills Board has been involved for some time with the sustainable management of the countryside for recreation and tourism, recognising the economic benefits to the AONB but also the role that it plays in providing healthy enjoyment of the outdoors. The AONB Board is increasingly getting involved in initiatives that promote the value of the landscape as a means of improving mental health and wellbeing. A series of short videos produced during the preparation of the Management Plan, under the heading 'My Surrey Hills', explored the positive responses of different people to their natural surroundings. The videos are available on the Surrey Hills website. The symposium being organised at Surrey University in November will explore this further. As an example of this area of work, the AONB Trust Fund provided funding to the Leatherhead Youth Project enabling disadvantaged young people to get out into the Surrey Hills. This side of the AONB's work fits well with MVDC's Community Wellbeing priority.

5.0 AONB Boundary Review and Glover Review

- 5.1 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 is likely to 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.
- 5.2 The second piece of work is the Government's review of protected landscapes, known as the Glover Review. The Review is due to report later this year and there may be significant implications for AONBs, including issues relating to governance, financing and statutory purposes. For this reason the Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan review 2020-2025 has been 'light touch' in approach until the findings of the Glover review have been published and the approach the Government will take to it are clearer.

6.0 Management Plan Review and Consultation

- 6.1 In March this year the Surrey Hills Board agreed a draft of the Management Plan that it is recommending for adoption by the constituent local authorities. It has been the result of several months of work during which officers have reviewed

the previous Management Plan and carried out targeted consultations.

- 6.2 Consultation was undertaken prior to the Management Plan review. The 60th anniversary of the Surrey Hills AONB designation was marked by a symposium at Surrey University which 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.
- 6.3 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. A full Habitats Regulations Assessment and Environmental Report was prepared which recommended a small strengthening of one policy in the plan. This is referred to later in the report. This change is not included in the version of the plan attached to this report but will be included in the final version. The full text of the policy will read:
- Policy B1: Existing designated sites (SSSIs, SPAs & SACs) within the AONB will be conserved, enhanced & managed by partners with the support of Natural England, to ensure that all such sites are brought into or maintained in 'favourable' condition. 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.*
- 6.4 Subject to the views of the AONB authorities, the AONB Board will meet in September to agree arrangements for the publication and launch of the Management Plan towards the end of this year.

7.0 Summary of Main Changes

- 7.1 A copy of the reviewed Management Plan is attached as Appendix 1 to this report. Set out below is a summary of the amendments to the existing Management Plan 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.
- 7.2 Section 1 - there are minor changes which provide the overall context for the Plan.
- 7.3 Section 2 - 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.
- 7.4 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.
- 7.5 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.
- 7.6 The Biodiversity policy has 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. In response to a recommendation in the Habitats Regulations Assessment Policy B1 has been strengthened to include reference to promoting information and awareness campaigns. A change to Policy B4 seeks biodiversity gains through the planning process.

- 7.7 The Historic and Cultural policy area has been subject to very minor changes to improve readability.
- 7.8 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.
- 7.9 Within the Planning policies 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.
- 7.10 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.
- 7.11 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.
- 7.12 Section 3 - undergone 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.
- 7.13 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.

8.0 Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are no additional financial resources identified to implement the Management Plan. Since the Plan represents a 'light touch' review, it is not expected that additional resources will be needed over and above those available over the past five years. The sources of funding for small-scale capital projects will remain grant schemes, revenue funding and CIL Neighbourhood funds.
- 8.2 The Council is a core funding partner of the Surrey Hill Board, contributing in the region of £5,300 annually. The majority of the Surrey Hills Unit running costs is provided in the form of an annual DEFRA grant.
- 8.3 As mentioned in the report, a major review of designated landscapes will report to the Government later this year. It will include recommendations on the funding of both AONBs and National Parks. It is recognised that AONBs are not funded generously, particularly in comparison to National Parks, and there may be some positive recommendations in relation to AONB funding. On the other hand, the Glover review may include not just a statutory requirement to produce a management plan but a duty also to implement it.

9.0 Legal Implications

- 9.1 The production of the Management Plan is a statutory requirement under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

10.0 Options

- Option 1: is an agreement to adopt the Management Plan with any minor

additions or corrections requested by Members. Under this option the Cabinet would recognise that the other partner local authorities, who are also required to adopt the Plan, may have their own minor changes to suggest. To avoid a situation where the Plan would have to be referred back to the partners again, minor changes suggested by each of the local authority partners will be incorporated into a final version of the plan and agreed with the Cabinet Member for Planning.

Option 2: would involve an agreement to adopt but with significant changes to the document that would require it to be resubmitted to the other local authority partners to be agreed a second time. This is likely to delay the adoption to the document and a revised timetable would be required to enable to Council to adopt within the statutory period.

Option 3 would involve rejection of the Plan requiring a substantial redraft. The likelihood of achieving an adoption within the statutory timeframe would be small and dispensation would be required from DEFRA to delay adoption. This would have implications for the other local authority partners.

11.0 Corporate Implications

Monitoring Officer commentary

The Monitoring Officer confirms that all relevant legal implications have been taken into account.

S151 Officer commentary

All relevant financial implications have been taken into account.

Risk Implications

Option 1: this is the option that would involve fewer risks in terms of adopting the Management Plan within the statutory time period. Minor changes could be incorporated without further delays.

Option 2: rejecting the Management Plan for a significant redraft would cause complications because of the need to go back to other partners and agree these changes. Delays could be significant and the possibility of delaying the Plan beyond the statutory adoption period is high.

Option 3: the delays involved in this option would almost certainly require the agreement of DEFRA to extend the statutory adoption period and it is not clear how the other local authority partners or DEFRA would react.

Equalities Implications

Policies in the Management Plan are quite high level, but it is recognised, and discussed at some length at the Symposium in Surrey University, that there can be significant blocks to disabled people accessing the countryside. It is also recognised that ethnic minorities are less likely to access the Surrey Hills and there is an issue of promotion and awareness to be addressed. None of the policies advocated in the Management Plan will prevent these issues from being addressed.

Employment Issues

There are no direct employment issues in relation to MVDC staff.

Sustainability Issues

Underlying the policies in the Management Plan are a range of issues relating to the sustainable management of the countryside and sustainable development. The plan seeks to promote the conservation of the landscape and to balance development pressures, community development and conservation objectives. The Plan has been assessed in terms of the impact its policies have on the environment.

Consultation

Consultation has been covered in the main body of the report but it included online questionnaire, public symposium and social media.

Communications

It is suggested that a press release is issued when all the local authority partners have considered the report and the Surrey Hills AONB Board has agreed the Management Plan for publication at the end of September. A press release will be prepared by the Surrey Hills team to be agreed with the partners. The launch of the Management Plan will take place formally at a symposium on 27th November.

Background Papers

Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan 2109 (appendix 1)

