

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –
13TH SEPTEMBER 2005**

Title:








Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Memorandum of Agreement

[Wards Affected: Bramley, Busbridge and Hascombe, Witley and Hambledon, Chiddingfold and Dunsfold, Shamley Green and Cranleigh North, Elstead and Thursley, Peperharrow, Ewhurst, Frensham, Dockenfield and Tilford, Blackheath and Wonerish, Haslemere, Critchmere and Shottermil, Hindhead, Haslemere East and Grayswood]

Summary and purpose:

To seek the Council's continuing support for the Surrey Hills local authority partnership and the work of the Surrey Hills AONB Unit.

Quality of life implications – social, environmental & economic (sustainable development):

						
Natural Resource Use	Pollution Prevention and Control	Biodiversity and Nature	Local Environment	Social Inclusion	Safe, Healthy and Active Communities	Local Economy
Yes	NA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

The purpose of the Surrey Hills designation is to protect, conserve and enhance the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, encourage quiet enjoyment of the landscape for all and ensure development is sustainable and appropriate to the area's character.

E-Government implications

There are no e-government implications arising from the report. Surrey Hills AONB promotes its activities through a dedicated web site www.surreyhills.org. Which can also be accessed via the Council's website.

Resource and legal implications

Waverley is being asked to renew its commitment to the Surrey Hills partnership by signing an updated Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that is essentially the same as the Council signed in 2002. The Legal Section have advised that the MOA is a legal agreement that confirms the Council's intention to make financial contributions to the core funding of the AONB Unit and to maintain the level of contribution in line with inflation in future years.

There is provision for a partner to terminate the Agreement with three months notice, which would lead to a review of the viability of the continuation of the partnership. Waverley is the

only one of the six councils within the partnership who has not yet signed up to the new agreement or met its financial contributions in full. To date, the Council's funding contributions under the MOA has been determined and allocated through the Sponsorship Organisation Scheme (SOS), which has not always approved the inflationary increases requested.

Background

1. The Surrey Hills was designated an Area of Outstanding Beauty in 1958. This is of particular significance to the Borough as around 60% of Waverley is designated AONB and half of the total area of the Surrey Hills AONB is within Waverley. To assist in the co-ordinated management of this nationally important landscape (equivalent to National Park status) a local authority partnership 'The Surrey Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee' (JAC) was set up in 1998. Waverley Borough Council is represented on the JAC by Councillors Byron Grainger-Jones and John Sandy.
2. A Surrey Hills AONB Unit, of four staff, delivers the work of the Surrey Hills JAC, which includes:-
 - Preparation of a Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan, monitoring and reviewing its progress. This has become a **statutory** duty for local authorities under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.
 - Promoting the importance of the AONB widely, providing landscape and planning advice to help ensure it is protected, conserved and enhanced.
 - Promoting sustainable development and public enjoyment
 - Involving communities in the management of the AONB
3. Recent projects include: Quiet Lanes and highway enhancement, Explorer Bus and rail promotion, Surrey Hills Sustainable Tourism Initiative, Surrey Hills local produce branding and Surrey Hills boundary markers, A3 Hindhead Area economic potential project, Inspiring Views and Building Design Guidance. A summary of the current and future work of the Surrey Hills AONB Unit is at Annexe 1.
4. The work of the Surrey Hills Unit is covered by a MOA between the Countryside Agency, the six constituent local authorities within the AONB and The National Trust. The MOA includes a commitment to funding the Unit's core costs. The Countryside Agency provides 75% of the funding and the remainder comes from the constituent local authorities based on a funding formula. Waverley's contribution is 3% of the total core costs.
5. Following Executive approval on 12 June 2001 Waverley signed the original MOA. The financial contributions have been allocated through the Sponsored Organisations Scheme, however Waverley's contributions have in recent years not included the inflationary rise agreed through the MOA. In 2005/06 Waverley contributed £5,423.
6. The Countryside Agency's grant aid is dependent on the MOA being reviewed at three-year intervals. Waverley has now been asked by the Countryside Agency to renew its commitment by signing a new MOA effective from 13th April 2005 for six years with a review in 2008.

Conclusion

7. The Surrey Hills Unit carries out important strategic work, which delivers key parts of Waverley's local plan and the Council's AONB statutory management responsibilities. It lever in additional funding which benefits the Borough, through the substantial funding per annum from the Countryside Agency (£138,000) and other project funding (£80,000). If Waverley does not renew its commitment to this local authority partnership the grant funding from the Countryside Agency would be put at risk and the other local authorities are also likely to reduce or withdraw their funding. This would then require Waverley to pick up some elements of the Unit's work itself resulting in additional financial and staff resource implications. Waverley's annual contribution of only 3% of the costs (around £5,700 in 2006/07) represents excellent value for money bearing in mind 50% of the AONB is within Waverley. It would cost Waverley considerably more than this, to fulfil its statutory duty, without the work of the Surrey Hills AONB Unit.

Recommendation

8. It is recommended that the Executive agrees to makes an `in principle` commitment to sign the new Memorandum of Agreement and then considers the financial implications as part of the Sponsored Organisation Scheme, noting the previous difficulties of funding inflation through this scheme.

Background Papers (D of E&L)

Memorandum of Agreement from 13 April 2005

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