



Chairman's report

Busy year ahead for Society members

Now that we are firmly into 2010, our last event of the 'noughties' – a pre-Christmas walk at Belmont School, Holmbury St Mary, near Dorking – seems a long time ago. However it was important as it was a happy and successful way of marking the end of what I see as a first stage in the Surrey Hills Society's life.

On that day, I met with a group of members and friends at Belmont School where, thanks to the generosity of the headmistress, we could enjoy a walk in and around the grounds of the school followed by a festive reception. Over forty members and guests – plus a large number of their canine companions –



turned up for this event. They were rewarded by pleasant weather and a very sociable time as we meandered through the woods.

It was an opportunity to reflect on how, over the past year, the Society has given many people the chance to meet new friends as well as highlighting some of the issues in the Surrey Hills

AONB, such as aircraft noise, oil and gas development and others.

So it is now time to look ahead to what promises to be a very busy spring, summer and autumn. We feel we are moving into a new stage for the Society, as a more mature organisation with a much more detailed programme, partly thanks to the efficiency of our new administrator, June Robinson.

For one of our events, I am planning to have my Chairman's Day on Wednesday April 28th. I have spoken with Alan Jones who is the Chairman-elect of Tandridge District Council and sat on the panel with me at last autumn's Wood Fuel and Wind Debate. He and his chief executive are both pleased that we are going to go to Tandridge as they often feel left out!

We also have a visit to Loseley Park, a short walk along the River Tillingbourne exploring the gunpowder works at Chilworth, an evening talk on Surrey's Wild Deer with one of our trustees, Nigel Davenport, chief executive of Surrey Wildlife Trust, and many more events and activities. The full programme, as it stands now, is on our website, at www.surreyhillssociety.org so have a look and get involved.

Neil Maltby, chairman Surrey Hills Society



De-cluttering in Surrey

A pioneering de-cluttering project, launched in Hambledon last autumn, looks likely to lead to similar changes in other parts of the county. Old, corroded, metal highway signs have been spoiling the natural environment of our rural villages. The Hambledon project has seen them replaced by posts of solid oak and low level, wood-mounted speed limit repeater signs. Funded by Hambledon Parish Council, the Surrey Hills Board and a contribution from the Surrey Hills Local Transport Plan allocation, de-cluttering now has the support

of Surrey County Council which is looking to de-clutter more village lanes in the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Dr Lynne Hack is Surrey's cabinet member for the environment and a Surrey Hills AONB board member. She chairs a Highway Working Group on de-cluttering the Surrey Hills and says that the costs of the measures which have been used in Hambledon are comparable with using metal posts, while the removal of clutter will reduce maintenance costs.



Liz Cable, Derek Miller and Lynne Hack

Revising the Surrey Hills AONB boundary?



Last November, Society chairman Neil Maltby met Andrew Wood, an executive director of Natural England, at Cherkley Court, near Leatherhead. The meeting had been organised by the Surrey Hills Board to discuss possible alterations to the boundary of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The issue Andrew Wood had come to discuss is that there are some beautiful parts of Surrey which are outside the AONB boundary. Some of these, designated as Areas of Great Landscape Value (AGLVs), are facing particular pressures and may possibly cease to exist in the future. The concern is that, if the AGLVs lose their designation, the AONB itself will be under threat and some of the outstanding views from the Surrey Hills may be lost.

The purpose of the meeting was to enable us, that is to say the Surrey Hills Society, along with the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), Surrey Hills Board, the local authorities and others, to explain to Andrew Wood the value we place on the land covered by the AGLV designation and its importance to the Surrey Hills AONB.

For his part, Andrew Wood told us that he appreciated the work the Surrey Hills Board and its constituent planning authorities had done to make the case for reviewing the AONB boundary. He said that Natural England would be exploring this further in



Enjoying a Surrey Hills view

Photo © Natural England / Anne-Katrin Purkiss

the context of other protected landscape work. Natural England will have to establish criteria for boundary changes and there will, inevitably, be a public consultation. It is at this point, we think, that the Surrey Hills Society will be an important voice in determining how the boundary review goes.

Reading the signs in the woods



Tackling illegal use of Surrey's BOATs

Illegal vehicular activity is a problem on many green lanes and woods in Surrey. Various initiatives are now underway, including co-ordinated targeted operations by the police and volunteers, and the introduction of new signage on these Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs, sometimes referred to as "Green Lanes"). The signs, produced by Surrey County Council, help members of the public to quickly and accurately pinpoint where they are and give numbers to ring to report the

crime. Members of the Surrey Hills Society are being urged to assist Surrey Police to deal with the illegal users.

The Trail Riders Fellowship describes this as a "no-nonsense" approach to signage on BOATs with the aim of educating all users in the hope of reducing conflict. At the same time motorised users, carriage drivers, the AONB Board, landowners and the police are working together to clamp down on the use of illegal vehicles.

The Surrey Hills AONB says that conflict between the different users, often caused by ignorance of BOAT status, has been greatly increased by the illegal activity of an irresponsible minority. Often driving vehicles without registration plates or insurance, they are committing serious criminal offences as well as creating a nuisance for local residents.

The local police representative, PC Jo Morris, asks that anyone observing illegal vehicular activity in the AONB should note as many details as possible, including any registration numbers, and pass them on to the police at this number 0845 125 2222, using the location details and police reference on the signs.

New BOAT signs





Inglis Memorial, Reigate – one of Surrey's iconic spots



Surrey Hills – now in glorious PowerPoint

Photo © Natural England/Aime-Katrin Purjes

Those of you who periodically look at our website may have noticed that there is now a logo for the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) on our home page. This is because last year a member suggested that a good way to increase membership would be to develop a PowerPoint presentation to promote the Society. Over the late summer, this took shape.

Once we knew that we had a product to present, our next challenge was to ensure we could give a high class performance. We felt the Society should have its own computer projector, screen and laptop so that speakers could go out to the various venues, confident that it would function well and we could be relatively selfsufficient. However, this would have made a significant hole in our funds, which is why the SDF enters the story.

The SDF's remit is to support projects which bring social, environmental and economic benefits to the Surrey Hills. Grants are made to organisations, businesses, community groups and individuals who wish to develop practical projects. We applied to the Fund for a grant and were offered support, subject to requirements such as showing the SDF logo on articles and our home page. We are happy to comply and wish to thank the SDF.

We are now up and running! The equipment has been used to present to several organisations, to members at East Horsley Village Hall and for a backdrop of Surrey Hills images during the Guildford Farmers Market in November. Further presentations are already booked but if you think that a group would be interested in a presentation on "The Surrey Hills and The Surrey Hills Society" please contact us at info@surreyhillsociety.org or on 01372 220647. We do not charge a fee but do request a donation.

Home Improvements for Surrey Hills Dormice

A £24,279 grant from the SITA Trust is allowing Surrey Wildlife Trust to undertake woodland enhancement work, vital for the survival of Surrey's important dormouse population. The work is timely as this year, 2010, is the International Year of Biodiversity, to which the Wildlife Trust is totally committed.

Mainly due to habitat loss, dormice are rare and endangered. Their numbers have dropped dramatically (by 70%) in the UK over the last 25 years and they are listed as a priority species on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

The Wildlife Trust is using this funding to improve 34 woodland sites across Surrey, many of them within the AONB, including Nower Wood, Netherlands Plantation and Netley Wood. By creating and maintaining cover and pathways through the trees the project will connect fragmented woodland sites and, in turn, isolated populations of woodland species. The Trust will also advise woodland owners and managers on habitat management.

The Trust wants dormouse populations to reach sustainable levels so that they can withstand seasonal variations in weather and food shortages.

Volunteers will play an important role in the project. Once fully trained and in possession of a license (required by law to handle dormice), they will help with the woodland improvements and monitoring.



Dave Williams, Surrey Wildlife Trust Mammal Project Officer, says: "Dormice may be more widespread than we think, but their numbers are low. Having already located some populations that are hanging on, we can improve their habitat to help boost their numbers, whilst at the same time ensuring many other species, including bats and butterflies, will benefit." Find out more at www.surreywildlifetrust.org

Loseley Visit – Sunday 9th May

Have you ever wanted to see more of Loseley House and its Gardens and Park? If so, Society members and guests will have a unique opportunity on Sunday 9th May, starting at 12 noon, when they will have a personal welcome from the owner of Loseley House and an advisory member of the Surrey Hills AONB Board, Michael More-Molyneux. Lunch is included in the £20 ticket price. Booking opens this month, and it promises to be a special day in this year's calendar, which we hope will have much support. Please see our website for more information.



Events

A wide variety of events are on offer for Society Members. Please book promptly to avoid disappointment, but please also note that we have now introduced a system where bookings for popular events cannot be made before a particular date defined for each event (generally eight weeks before the event). These details are on the website.

Sunday 7th March **Gatton Park**

On Sunday 7th March, from 1.00 to 5.00pm, entry to Gatton Park, near Reigate, is at a reduced rate for Surrey Hills Society members, of two tickets for the price of one. Guided tours are available of this historic site and you can find out more on 01737 649065 or by looking at the Gatton Park website at www.gattonpark.com. No booking is needed for this offer, just turn up with your membership card.

Wednesday 28th April **Chairman's Day**

This year's Chairman's Day will be on Wednesday 28th April, in the Tandridge area. Details are still being finalised but it will be a day of walks and visits around Tandridge. Booking opens shortly, so see our website www.surreyhillssociety.org or call 01372 220647.

Sunday 9th May **Loseley House tour**

Members can have a personal welcome from the owner of Loseley House Michael More-Molyneux who will greet them and give them a guided tour of the House and Gardens starting at 12 noon. Lunch is included in the £20 ticket price. Booking for this event opens this month. See our website www.surreyhillssociety.org or call 01372 220647.

There are many other events planned through the year, so join in as we celebrate our wonderful Surrey Hills. For more information on the Society's events visit our website www.surreyhillssociety.org or call 01372 220647.

Saturday 17th July **Surrey Hills Society** **dinner at Wotton** **House, near Dorking**

Last year's dinner in Guildford was a great success so we are pleased to be offering an even more exciting venue for this year's dinner on Saturday 17th July. Wotton House is the venue. Details for this event are still being finalised, but booking starts in March. See our website www.surreyhillssociety.org or call 01372 220647.

Tuesday 24th August **Children's Woodland** **Adventure at Outwood** **Common**

On Tuesday 24th August, we are holding a children's woodland adventure afternoon, with bark rubbing and bug hunts, plus advice on why trees are so important. This event is limited to a maximum of 20, plus parents, and booking opens in May. See our website www.surreyhillssociety.org or call 01372 220647.

Saturday 16th October **Members' Day at** **Gatton Park**

We will be holding a Members' Day on Saturday 16th October at Gatton Park near Reigate. There will be updates on the progress of the Society in the morning, followed by a buffet lunch. In the afternoon there will be a guided tour and walk round the Capability Brown designed landscape. Members will receive further details of the day nearer the time.

Joining with Guildford Farmers' Market

On the first Tuesday of every month Guildford High Street hosts a Farmers' Market. At last November's event Guildford Borough Council joined up with the Surrey Hills Society and the managers of the Farmers' Market, with support from the Surrey Hills Board. The Old Surrey Downs Project was there with an exhibition and information about our rare chalk grassland habitats, the National Trust came and there were displays by the Sussex and Surrey Coppice Group, All Biked Up and the Surrey Hills Wood Fuel Group.



Thanks to Guildford Museum we also had access to an unusual vaulted mediaeval cellar, The Undercroft, in the High Street, which is rarely open to the public. Here our exhibit showed Fifty Years of Food and Farming in the Surrey Hills as well as contemporary images of our beautiful Surrey Hills, together with photographs and video footage from one of the county's most established farming families – the Stovolds. We also displayed information about opportunities to explore the Surrey Hills.

The weather, unfortunately, was against us, with horrendous downpours in the afternoon. Flash flooding down the High Street sent people diving for cover. So we owe a big thank you to all the SHS volunteers who braved the weather and came to support the event, as well as to Guildford Borough Council and all our fellow exhibitors. We are also working on getting some sturdier and better display equipment to put on a stronger event and we look forward to working with the Farmers' Market and Guildford again this year.

Founder Member – June Robinson

When retirement from teaching loomed, I pursued my interest in art and joined the National Association of Decorative & Fine Arts Societies (NADFAS). I'm an inveterate "organiser" and eventually became East Surrey Area Chairman.



Whilst "googling" Shere Museum for NADFAS Heritage Volunteers, I came across an unmissable event organised by the newly-formed Surrey Hills Society. I saw its aims paralleled those of NADFAS – to raise awareness of our heritage and conserve it for future generations. This struck a chord and so I joined the Surrey Hills Society as a Founder Member.

By coincidence, the round-robin from the Society seeking an Administrator came as I was approaching completion of my term as NADFAS Area Chairman – I responded and now work with an enthusiastic team of volunteers dedicated to protecting all that is special in our Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It's extremely rewarding and you'd be very welcome if you'd like to become involved – just e-mail me at info@surreyhillssociety.org.uk

June Robinson – Administrator