

# Annual Review 2019 - 2020



Promoting and Enhancing  
The Surrey Hills  
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty





# About Us

The Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is one of 46 nationally protected landscapes in the UK, having equal landscape status and protection to a National Park.

The Surrey Hills Society (SHS) is an independent charity promoting the positive enjoyment and care of the Surrey Hills AONB for those who live, work in, or visit the area. The Society encourages people to explore and learn about the special qualities and distinctiveness of the area.

At its heart, the Society has a thriving membership organisation, which provides a vehicle for increasing the knowledge and enjoyment of the area by our members.

The Trustees and Management Team of the Society are all unpaid volunteers. There are about 60 active volunteers with at least 20 key volunteers, who regularly support us on a monthly or weekly basis. We also have one paid, part time, Co-ordinator role.

Many of our Trustees and Management Team have active roles within the charity delivering various aspects of our work.

Due to this high level of volunteering, all the monies received by the Society, whether from internal activities, external grants or donations can (apart from internal running costs) be used to support the outreach and wider goals of the organisation as described in the Charity's Aims.



*Some of the 60 members who attended our AGM*

## What We Offer



*Bright sunshine for our Heritage Open Day walk*

**For our members,** we offer a wide-ranging programme of talks, visits and walks. All of these are designed to increase the understanding and awareness of our members and their guests of the special landscape and features which characterise the AONB.

**For the wider public,** we provide information about the AONB through our presence at a large number of shows and events across Surrey.

**For other groups and organisations,** we offer talks about the Surrey Hills using expert volunteer speakers. The income from these talks helps to support the wider work of the Society.

**For the AONB itself,** the Society forms part of the public face of the AONB, acts on behalf of the AONB Board to promote the area to the public and works with the Board to undertake or support initiatives, which help to deliver their Management Plan.



# Our Members

We have around 500 memberships and, of these, roughly 200 are family memberships including more than one person in a household. We also have 32 of the parish councils as members and other organisations as affiliate members such as the Surrey Wildlife Trust, Dorking and District Preservation Society, The Mid Surrey Ramblers Association and several local history societies. We also have some commercial businesses as affiliate members such as the Investec International Music Festival, Bocketts Farm and the Albury Vineyard.

## Volunteering - April 2019 to March 2020



During 2019 to 2020 there were more than 60 active volunteers supporting our Society in various ways. They undertake a wide range of tasks including practical volunteering, newsletter compilation and packing, supervising events, sitting on committees as well as external promotion of the Society.

- Almost 5,000 volunteer hours were committed during the year.
- 54 events were organised and delivered as part of our annual programme.
- 8 talks were given to external groups (with a further two postponed due to coronavirus).
- We attended 11 shows and external events across the county with our promotional displays.
- We raised £28,000 (unaudited figure) through membership fees, running educational events and talks, plus donations by individuals and businesses.

## Volunteers' Picnic

We very much value the contributions made by our volunteers to achieve such a wide ranging programme and, to mark this, a 'Thank you to the Volunteers' picnic was held in August 2019



*Attendees at our 'Thank you to the Volunteers' picnic*

## Sponsorship

We are very grateful to Anthony Wakefield & Co for sponsorship of our newsletter



# Events & Activities - April 2019 to March 2020

During this period, the Society undertook many activities and delivered numerous events including:

Organising and leading educational events e.g. learning to map read, Christmas wreath making, tree identification.



Free monthly walks on the first Sunday of each month - organised by SHS members/volunteers.

Co-organising events with other related organisations and charities such as Investec Leith Hill Music Festival and the Arts & Crafts Movement in Surrey.



Commencing a long-term collaboration with The Downlands Trust.

Continuing our close relationship with Surrey Wildlife Trust.



Participating in the Farnham Walking Festival by leading a walk along the North Downs Way from Farnham to Chilworth and providing leadership and volunteers for the Guildford Walking Festival.



Organising events hosted by member businesses of Surrey Hills Enterprises to help support local producers.



Visiting historic properties, Surrey Hills villages of interest and gardens of note, not normally open to the public.



Working closely with Surrey Hills Arts to assist with and promote various projects and initiatives throughout the year.



Promoting local farming with visits to The Hampton Estate and Manor Farm (Wotton) .



# Surrey Hills Symposium

In November, we were delighted to support the Surrey Hills AONB Symposium that was attended by over 400 people. The theme of the Symposium was the importance of nature in improving society's health and well-being. Speakers included Dame Penelope Keith, Dr William Bird MBE (who founded the Walking for Health charity) plus Professor Caroline Scarles and Dr Birgitta Gatersleben from the University of Surrey.

Perhaps the most important part of the evening was the launch of the "Into the Wild" research project. This study, commissioned by the Surrey Hills Trust Fund in association with LC Energy and the University, highlighted the significant deprivation that exists in some parts of Surrey. Staggeringly, some 10,000 young people aged between 5 and 15 in Surrey suffer from mental health issues. There is clear evidence that mental health issues can start at a very young age and early intervention can prevent a person suffering later in life. It is demonstrable that encouraging young people to experience and enjoy the outdoors has a lasting positive impact and as a Society we are keen to support projects that promote this approach.

The presentations and the full text of the "Into the Wild" research project can be seen at:

<https://www.surreyhills.org/symposium-2019/>

## Walking Festivals



A new addition to the Guildford Festival was a sponsored walk along the North Downs Way from Guildford to Dorking in aid of Guildford Street Angels. This was organised and led by Surrey Hills Society – with our Chairman and both Vice Presidents walking the route along with other SHS volunteers and numerous Street Angels supporters. The walk resulted in over £3,000 being raised to support the work of the Street Angels.

The Society has a tradition of leading walks right across the county so it has been a natural extension of our work to become more involved in local walking festivals. As already mentioned, in 2019 we supported Farnham Walking Festival. Our involvement with the Guildford Walking Festival was very extensive – our Vice President (Chris Howard) was Chairman, other SHS members formed part of the organising team and the Society hosted and led 12 of the walks during the month long event.



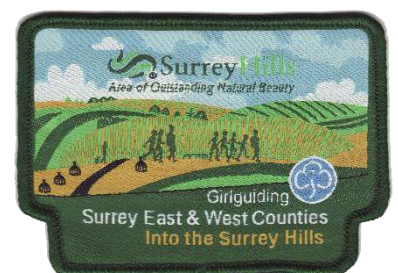
## New Initiative

In seeking ways to encourage more young people to get out into the Surrey Hills, one of our Trustees (Stella Cantor) who has also been a Girlguiding Commissioner, came up with the idea of creating a new Girlguiding badge.



The Society and the AONB were enthusiastic so Stella obtained the agreement of the Surrey East and West Girlguiding counties and commenced work.

To gain the badge, the Guides, Brownies or Rainbows need to complete an activity sheet and undertake a visit to a selected site within the AONB. The project has been a great success with over 1,000 worksheets supplied. Participants have headed out as groups or taken their parents with them. Feedback is that they have all had a great time as well as learning more about the Surrey Hills.



# Awards

## Queens Award for Voluntary Service

We noted in the 2018-19 Annual Review that the Society had been nominated for the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service (QAVS) and in February 2019 had been informed that we were shortlisted as one of 13 Surrey based organisations. This award, which is the equivalent of an MBE for volunteers, is announced on the Queen's birthday in June each year. We were therefore extremely proud to be informed that we were to receive the Award.

Our Vice President (Ken Bare) and his wife attended a Buckingham Palace Garden Party as the Society representatives. [This was a slightly surreal situation since the Award is only made public in June but the Garden Parties take place in early May.]

Following publication of the Award recipients, we were requested by the Lord Lieutenant's office to delay the celebration of our success.



This was because a small number of Award presentations are carried out by members of the Royal family and the Society had been selected as one of these – subject to Royal engagements. After various delays, we were informed in early October that HRH Prince Edward, Earl of Wessex, would present our award to us on 6th November. We then had to find a venue and create suitable displays to support the event. With great support from the Friends of Albury Old Saxon Church, the Albury Estate and many others we were able to mount an impressive display which the Earl appeared to enjoy – he stayed significantly longer than his schedule suggested and talked with many of the invited volunteers.

Understandably, this success gave us significant additional media coverage and now allows us to use the QAVS logo on all our publications and communications.

More details about the Award event may be found in our Winter 2019-2020 newsletter which can be accessed on the Society's website:

<https://www.surreyhillssociety.org/newsletters/>



## Recognition by Mole Valley District Council

Following the announcement of our QAVS success, we were contacted by Mole Valley District Council (MVDC). They wished to acknowledge our work and invited representatives of the Society to attend a Full Council meeting to give a brief presentation and to receive a certificate from them.

Mole Valley was well represented this year with the Pixham based Patchworking Garden project also receiving the QAVS.

**Certificate presentation to SHS and Patchworking Garden by Mary Huggins, Chairman of MVDC**





# Marketing & Communications

We continue to have a good working relationship with local publications such as Surrey Life and Vantage Point.

Chris Howard writes a monthly countryside column in Surrey Life and also provides content for the self-guided walk page. This walk frequently becomes the basis of our free monthly walk and is a useful tool in publicising the Society and increasing membership.

We continue to produce our 8-page full colour newsletter 3 times a year with a print run of 3,500 copies. These are distributed to members, Surrey's library network, all Borough & District councillors, a number of local business outlets and handed out at all the shows, events and talks which we attend.

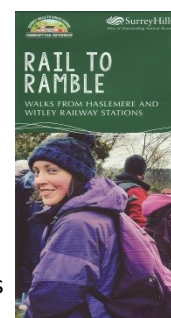
Late in 2019 the Society increased its focus on social media in an effort to reach a wider audience and modified demographic. Although it is early days and creating a following takes time, it is pleasing to note that we have already attracted 180 followers on Instagram (Reach, over 1,700), 200 followers on Twitter (Impressions, over 33,000), and 40 followers on Facebook (Reach, over 600). In addition, an internal WhatsApp group has significantly improved our publicity processes and hence enabled us to keep our social media presence refreshed regularly.



## Working with the Surrey Hills Family

The strength of the Surrey Hills Family of AONB Board, Society, Enterprises and Trust Fund is that they all have specific but complementary roles and audiences. The Society works with all the other family members. Our Chairman is also the Chairman of the Trust Fund so there are clear opportunities to work together for fund raising and projects. As seen earlier in this report, we have visited several members of Surrey Hills Enterprises to learn more about local producers – and hence support “buy local”. Over the last year however, our greatest interaction has probably been with the AONB Board and Management Team.

2019-20 has seen the production and launch of the new five year Management Plan for the AONB. The Society has been actively involved in the development of this and is now a key delivery partner for the various activities identified within it.



A new project which will develop over future years is the Dark Skies initiative. Our Chairman sits on this multi-group team which has come together under the auspices of the AONB Management Team. This group includes CPRE, Surrey Wildlife Trust, Guildford Astronomical Society and several other groups - so is a true example of wider collaboration.

Another collaboration has been between the Society, the AONB Management Team and Surrey Hills to South Downs Community Rail Partnership. Together we have created, test walked and launched a leaflet covering a walk from Haslemere to Witley with an extension to Godalming. This has been handed out at shows and talks and is also available via the rail hub at Haslemere.



Some projects have lives of several years – and so it is with the Tales of the Tillingbourne. This started off as a Heritage Lottery Fund grant project several years ago but the legacy phase is still going strong. The AONB Management Team were the “owners” of the project but the Society was the lead organisation for delivery. The walks produced by us continue to be very much in demand to the extent that, within the last year, we have had to go to a third print run. On Page 2 of this Report, we highlighted what we offer to various segments of society. This subsequent text has shown that we are meeting all of these commitments and remain a thriving charity.

**We hope that you have enjoyed reading about some of the activities of the Surrey Hills Society during the last year.**

**The Society is continuing to grow in size and stature as it seeks to involve a wider audience across the area.**

**If you would like more information about the Surrey Hills Society please visit our web site [www.surreyhillssociety.org](http://www.surreyhillssociety.org)**

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