

Surrey Hills Society

Chairman's Report for the Year Ending 31 March 2025

The **Surrey Hills Society** is a charity whose purposes are:

- to promote and enhance the Surrey Hills as a National Landscape of outstanding beauty;
- to increase awareness, understanding, and enjoyment of its natural and cultural heritage;
- to support conservation, protection, and improvement of the physical and natural environment; and
- to provide opportunities for education, recreation, and community engagement for the public benefit.

It gives me great pleasure to present the Chairman's Report for the Surrey Hills Society for the year ending 31 March 2025.

Overview

The Society continues to flourish, driven by the dedication of our volunteers, the generosity of our members, and the enthusiasm of all who share our passion for the Surrey Hills National Landscape. This year has seen excellent progress across events, conservation projects, publications, and community engagement.

Events Programme

During 2024/25, the Society delivered **41 events** across the Surrey Hills. These ranged from guided walks and talks to cultural and heritage visits. A further 3 events were planned, two of which had to be cancelled due to adverse weather conditions and one due to a problem with the venue.

The events programme generated **£8,978.50 of income**, with costs of **£6,591.06**, resulting in a healthy **surplus of £2,387.44**.

I extend warm thanks to **Sall Baring** and the **Events Team**, whose dedication, creativity, and hard work ensured such a varied and successful programme.

Volunteer Contribution

Our volunteers remain the lifeblood of the Society. Their contributions span far beyond conservation and events — from newsletters, shows, and communications to administration and membership support.

This year, they have been instrumental in:

- editing and distributing newsletters.
- representing the Society at county shows and fairs.
- supporting communications, including Mailchimp updates.
- handling bookings and administration.
- stewarding events and leading guided walks.

In particular, I would like to thank:

- **Peter Salisbury**, for his invaluable work with minutes, MailChimp communications, and bookings administration

- **Stella Cantor**, who manages our membership and IT as well as supervising the distribution of our newsletters
- **Jean Arnold** who manages our shows programme
- **All our contributors** to the newsletters that we publish 3 times a year particularly **Chris Howard, Ken Bare, Suzie Turner and Diane Cooper**
- **Lesley Crofts**, who although paid part-time effectively volunteers as well as she goes way beyond the call of duty in the way in which goes about assisting with all our bookings and the website.

On behalf of the Trustees, I express my heartfelt thanks to all our volunteers — your dedication, goodwill, and generosity underpin everything the Society achieves.

Conservation and Community Projects

Our conservation work has continued to expand, with measurable results and growing community impact. Sadly Christa Emmett left at the end of March to join the Surrey Wildlife Trust. However, we wish her every success and are delighted to welcome Kate Bannister who joined us in October 2024 as our new Project and Volunteer Coordinator. Under their supervision:

- **38 dedicated volunteer sessions** were held, engaging a total of **540 volunteers** — equivalent to 1.5 volunteers working every day of the year.
- Volunteers contributed **1,756.5 hours**, amounting to 73 working days (around one fifth of the year).
- **1.653 km of new hedgerows** were planted — equivalent to the distance from Denbies Community Garden to the viewpoint at Box Hill.
- An impressive **9,924 trees** were planted, strengthening biodiversity and enhancing the Surrey Hills landscape.

Growing Together: Inclusion and Conservation

A significant highlight of the year has been the progress of the **Growing Together** project, generously supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund with a grant of nearly **£145,000**. This ambitious initiative aims to create a lasting legacy of inclusive environmental conservation in the Surrey Hills, ensuring everyone has the opportunity to access and enjoy our special landscape.

From June 2024 to March 2025, the project delivered **25 events**, totalling **53 hours of activity**, and engaged **205 participants**. These included:

- **28** members of charities supporting people with disabilities;
- **101** service users of charities supporting people with learning disabilities;
- **50** members of minority ethnic communities;
- **30** participants from organisations supporting people with poor mental health.

Three key partners — the **Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum**, the **Surrey Coalition of Disabled People**, and **Surrey Choices** — have been central to the programme's success, helping ensure that activities are co-designed and accessible to diverse communities.

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and I would particularly like to thank our Growing Together Project Manager, India Davies for the amazing work she has done in developing the programme and then making it happen! Participants reported increased confidence, improved wellbeing, and a stronger sense of belonging. Growing Together demonstrates how conservation and getting out into the countryside can be a catalyst for

inclusion, learning, and transformation. We are grateful to the National Lottery Players for making this project possible and are excited about its lasting impact.

Care Farm Activities

Our **Care Farm programme** has grown into a vibrant and therapeutic strand of our work, providing opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to connect with land, farming, and nature. This has been brilliantly managed by Katie Daws, who has brought her experience of both farming and supporting those with mental health issues to bear to develop a truly fantastic programme. Working with **four farms** across the Surrey Hills 71 participants were referred over 85 visits through **ten sources**, including Growing Health Together, Surrey Choices, YMCA, Haven/Mind Works, Family Voice Matters, Extended Hope, Amber, Social Prescribing networks, Way Through, and self-referrals.

Activities covered:

- **Animal care** — supporting veterinary checks, calving, hoof trimming, feeding, and welfare monitoring.
- **Farm management** — mucking out, repairing fences, maintaining water and feed systems, and record-keeping.
- **Environmental conservation** — building bug hotels, composting, planting hedgerows, and managing pastures.
- **Equestrian activities** — horse riding and handling.

The programme has delivered clear benefits for wellbeing, confidence, and mental health, recognised in a **BBC feature**, “**Helping on the farm reaps mental health benefits.**” The Care Farm embodies our mission to connect people with nature while also supporting resilient rural communities.

The Thousand Year Tree

We are delighted by the success of the **stunning new book**, **The Thousand Year Tree** — a publishing first for the Surrey Hills Society. The book tells the story of Surrey’s ancient trees, beginning with the thousand-year-old yews at Newlands Corner, brought to life through poems, illustrations, and historical timelines.

This collaboration between author **Lucy Reynolds**, illustrator **Katie Hickey**, and pupils from Pine Class at Weyfield Primary Academy was delivered with support from the **Guildford Book Festival**, the **Old Dungate Press**, **Surrey County Council**, the **Surrey Hills National Landscape**, and **Defra’s Access for All Fund**, alongside **52 Surrey libraries**.

Over 20 schools have been visited, and workshops have helped children understand that while trees may appear strong and timeless, they are in fact fragile and in need of protection. Sales at Waterstones and independent bookshops have spread this important message widely.

Author Lucy Reynolds noted: “*The children’s creativity and hard work contributed to its enormous success, along with the range of partners involved who ensured the book reached its full potential. Its success has proved that this model works, paving the way for more sequels to come.*”

Building on this success, the Society is now developing a sequel — **A Raindrop Falls** — focusing on the ecology and history of the **Tillingbourne River**.

Partnerships and Community Engagement

We continue to work closely with the **Surrey Hills National Landscape team, Surrey Wildlife Trust, The National Trust**, numerous environmental and local organisations as well as community groups and schools. One of the strongest assets of the Society is our extensive network across the Surrey Hills. These partnerships amplify our work and ensure that the Society's activities are aligned with the wider vision for the Surrey Hills.

Financial Position

Our financial position remains sound. With prudent management of income from membership subscriptions, events, and fundraising, we have maintained a healthy balance while investing in projects that will build long-term capacity.

I extend my particular thanks to **Martin Cantor, our Treasurer**, for his excellent stewardship of the accounts and guidance to the Trustees.

Looking Ahead

As we move into 2025/26, we look to expand our conservation projects, strengthen our educational outreach, and secure new funding sources to underpin long-term sustainability. Our priorities will be to:

- consolidate and grow the *Growing Together* and *Care Farm* programmes;
- deliver *The Raindrop Falls* to schools and communities;
- expand our events programme to attract new audiences;
- increase our presence at shows, schools, and festivals;
- continue strengthening our volunteer network.

With the commitment of our volunteers, the dedication of our Trustees, and the support of our members and partners, the Society is well placed to continue playing a leading role in promoting, protecting, and celebrating the Surrey Hills.

Gordon Jackson
Chairman