

Surrey Hills Society Annual General Meeting 13 June 2009

Chairman's Report

We launched our Society in March 2008 and achieved registered Company and registered Charity status in the first six months. During our first year we have achieved 382 memberships, representing 643 members and 37 affiliate bodies. This surpassed our expectations and we have been staggered by the generous donations added by founder members.

We have received enormous support and encouragement from the Surrey Hills Board, its Chairman, Director and staff. We have also been very fortunate to have the help from a number of hard working and willing volunteers that have formed the Management Committee, sub-committees, office administration and event organisation, to whom I am extraordinarily grateful.

The Society has arranged a number of walks and visits in the year, as well as a training day and a launch party in Guildford. We facilitated a market fair in Dorking, to which over 1500 people came and also helped with the 50th Anniversary of the Surrey Hills AONB event at the House of Commons.

After an encouraging first year, we need to continue the growth and momentum of the Society. We will maintain the quality of our publicity and PR and organise representation at a number of shows and events in the county. We need to make our members aware of major planning applications in the AONB. We will push forward with our projects covering Mountain Biking, Woodland Management and Audio/Historical Guided Walks. We have an exciting future and I look forward to another challenging year and meeting as many members as possible.

Neil Maltby
Chairman

Annual Report for Membership Sub-Committee

Setting up a new Society from scratch has been an interesting experience. A small dedicated Sub-Committee consisting of Richard Pitts, Juliet Eberle, Andy Tanner and myself had to go about setting up procedures to process memberships and to bank payments. After contacting other similar Societies about membership rates and membership systems, it was determined that our Society would create its own database and we are grateful to Richard for his work in creating our system, not only to maintain membership records but also to store email addresses and produce address labels and personalised letters when appropriate.

Ordinary Memberships at the end of the first year have grown to 140 Single and 205 Family making a total of 345. This represents 548 adults and 95 children. In the first year those joining and giving an additional donation were recognised as Founder Members and 222 (64%) out of the 345 memberships are so recorded.

In addition the Society has been pleased by the response by 20 Parish Councils, Surrey County Council, and many local and national groups and societies, including The National Trust and Surrey Wildlife Trust who have all joined as Affiliate Members. 21 of these Affiliates are also recorded as Founder Affiliates.

Our membership drive in the first year has raised £13,690, which has included £8,680 in donations. The Society is hoping that when members renew they will be able to continue to give additional donations.

During this year, the Society has gained its Charitable Status and this has enabled us to produce a new membership leaflet in January 2009 with a Gift Aid section. Towards the end of the financial year, the Society has written to all ordinary members who joined using the original membership form asking them to sign a Gift Aid declaration. This will enable the Society to retrospectively claim back tax from HM Revenue & Customs, currently 28% on their subscriptions and donations since they joined the Society. This will hopefully raise around £2,500 on top of the £13,690. We would request all those who have not yet responded, and are able to do so to, to return their forms.

The Society is hoping that all members will decide to renew and will be looking at introducing new membership categories such as Life Memberships and new ways of paying such as Direct Debit.

My personal thanks must go to Richard and Juliet who have smoothly run the office side of the Membership Section and to Andy for his contribution both on the Membership and Management Committees and all three have greatly contributed to the success of setting up the Society. Unfortunately Andy is withdrawing from the Society's committee work due to his other commitments.

The Membership Sub-Committee is keen to recruit other volunteers to help in managing and expanding this important and critical Society function. Please contact myself (butlergc1@aol.com telephone: 01582-767062) for further information.

Graham Butler
Chairman of Membership Sub-Committee.

Annual Report for PR and Promotion Sub-Committee

This committee has met every two months, sometimes more, to develop the three newsletters that the Society has produced this year.

It has also designed the two membership leaflets, two email newsletters and promotional material for the Autumn Country Fair in Dorking Halls last November, celebrating 50 years of Food and Farming in the Surrey Hills.

The group also managed a £8,300 Sustainable Development Fund project to develop sustainable means of communicating with members of the Society. We are very grateful to the SDF Panel for their grant of £5,000 towards this project and for all the support the Board has given us in developing the activities. This included

promotional material for the Society at events and shows, funding for the newsletters and money for development of our website.

We are very grateful to Duncan Williamson for his work on the website, to Richard Pitts for developing and maintaining the events listing, and to John Rennie for all his efforts, writing and co-coordinating the newsletters. John has also done a lot of work with the local press to develop articles on a regular basis. We are grateful for the support Sheengate Publishing has given us with a monthly column in their glossy magazines that cover the whole of Surrey.

Chris Howard
Chairman of PR and Promotion Sub-Committee

Annual Report for Events Sub-Committee

One of the main objectives of the Surrey Hills Society when it was established was to provide a variety of events so that the members could enjoy and learn more about the Surrey Hills. With this in mind an Events Sub-Committee was set up to arrange a program of events.

Even though it was only early days for the Committee, they felt that it was very important that an interesting and varied program of events should be offered. The Committee also realised that with a limited team it was very important that it did not stretch itself too thinly trying to put on an extensive program of events in the first year. It was decided that the most effective way was to work with other organisations based in the Surrey Hills who already run events, such as the National Trust and the Horsley Countryside Preservation Society.

During 2008 the Society put on over ten events, which included a private guided tour of the Hindhead A3 tunnel, a private viewing of the Celebrating 50 Years of Food and Farming exhibition at Guildford House Gallery, a tour and talk on the Lovelace Bridges followed by a visit to the Surrey Hills Brewery and Wood Fuel Hub, a Walk Leadership Training Day, a guided tour of Reigate Fort and Gatton Park, as well as a number of talks about Surrey Hills, and the main event for 2008, the Surrey Hills Fair at Dorking Halls which on its own attracted over 1500 visitors.

After a very successful first year of events for the Society, 2009 is already seeing an exciting program of events, including a Chairman's Day, guided mountain bike tours, a talk on War and Peace in the Surrey Hills, a guided tour of Shere Museum and village, as well as a number of guided walks.

I would finally like to thank all those who have volunteered their time in arranging and running events for the Society, because without their support the first year's success would not have been achievable.

Mark Richards
Chairman of Events Sub-Committee