

DRAFT MINUTES – for confirmation at the 2014 AGM
Fifth Annual General Meeting of the Surrey Hills Society
11 am Saturday, 2 November 2013
at Parrott Inn, Forest Green, Surrey RH5 5RZ

1. **Welcome.** The President, Neil Maltby, welcomed members and thanked them for their continuing support. It was very rewarding to see the Society expanding and it is now a key part of the AONB family. He thanked the Trustees and Management Committee for their enthusiasm, commitment and hard work, particularly the Chairman, Christine Howard.
2. **Apologies for Absence** – Paul Bettinson, Graham and Sue Boyman, Pam Bulman, Nigel Davenport, Rob Fairbanks, Pamela Holt, Sheila Jones, Deborah Mason, Michael More Molyneux, Francis Sudbury, Rob Tong, Henry and Sue Willis,
3. **Minutes of the AGM held on 20 October 2012** – The Minutes were agreed by all at the meeting as a true record, signed by the Chairman and filed.
4. **Chairman’s Report** – a copy of the full text of the Chairman’s Report is attached.
Surrey Hills Trust – The President outlined the focus of the newly formed Surrey Hills Trust, the fourth leg of the Surrey Hills Family. The Trust was outside the scope of official government influence and would work with local communities, landowners and partner organisations to support projects and activities.
5. **Report of the Trustees and Financial Statements for the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013** – Copies of the accounts were available at the meeting and had been published on the website. Jo Tollow (Finance Director) highlighted key information in the Report. There were no questions.
6. **To confirm the appointment of Margaret Brett, a Partner of Bullimores Accountants as the independent financial examiner for 2013/14 and to authorise Trustees to fix remuneration.** The Chairman expressed thanks and appreciation to Margaret Brett of Bullimores for examining the accounts for the year to March 2013. The meeting unanimously agreed that Margaret Brett should be appointed independent financial examiner for the year to March 2014; she had again waived remuneration.
7. **To appoint and reappoint Trustees of the Society** (there should be no fewer than 5 nor more than 12). The President presented the nominees en bloc; the meeting agreed the appointments nem com.
Stella Cantor, Sarah Jane Chimvawandira, Alessandra Holly were appointed Trustees
Ken Bare, Paul Bettinson, Christine Howard (Chairman) will continue as Trustees
Jo Tollow (Finance Director), Rob Tong were re-appointed as Trustees
Diane Cooper, Nigel Davenport, Terry Driscoll were standing down; the President, Chairman and members present expressed their appreciation for their contribution to the success of the Society.
8. **Any other business** – Questions from the Membership:
Doug Sudbury asked if the Society had any contact with the local Members of Parliament. The President replied that the Society is not a lobbying group but individual Trustees and members do communicate their concerns on any actions which affect the AONB.
Richard Jameson urged caution on discussions on housing development on the Green Belt. Some of the opposition was based on inaccuracies and local people should engage in the debate and ensure they were involved in any consultations.
Madeleine Brooks asked if petitions on planning proposals could be circulated. The Chairman emphasised that there would be differing views amongst members. The Trustees felt the best course was to devote a page on the website to issues of concern within the Surrey Hills AONB. Links were provided to dedicated websites, where members could access information and form their own views.
Peter Hattersley highlighted a number of public meetings where members could make their views known. His opinion was that approaches from individuals within the communities involved made a greater impact than signatures on a petition.

The meeting closed with thanks to the Parrott Inn staff for hosting the meeting. Members then enjoyed a quiz identifying “Places in the Surrey Hills”, followed by a lunch of local produce.

Surrey Hills Society Chairman's report for AGM- October 2013.

Welcome to our 5th AGM and wow, look at us now! Not only have we managed to survive during the deepest recession since the war but we have continued to grow – both in membership, our profile and our support for this protected landscape that we all cherish.

Not only that but during my time volunteering with the charity I have met some truly wonderful fellow members who have become dear friends. I have also seen, experienced and learnt so much more about the Surrey Hills and it never ceases to amaze me how special this area is.

Our events offer has grown from strength to strength. I can remember in our first year we struggled to get enough volunteers to lead walks and talks and we struggled to put a calendar of events together. We now have at least one event per month and I am aware that we now have a new problem that some events are booking out within 24 hours of their release. We have tried to address this issue in the 2014 calendar with even more events and also repeats of the really popular events like Chilworth Gunpowder Mills and the Mullard Space Station visit. We have also extended our range of events in 2014 to appeal to a wider audience, including special events for families and for the 21-30 age group which includes two country “pub crawls of outstanding natural beauty”! I would very much like to thank all the volunteers who have either led or assisted with our programme in 2013. I would especially like to thank the National Trust and Surrey Wildlife Trust for their support and you will also notice in 2014 much more collaboration on events, joint events and promotion of the good work both these organisations do in the Surrey Hills.

I would also particularly like to thank Nigel Davenport, the Chief Executive of Surrey Wildlife Trust for the invaluable professional support he has given us as a Founder member of the Society. The knowledge and advice he has been able to give us (as a much more mature charity) has been invaluable and he will be sadly missed on the team. He is not able to be with us today but I wanted to recognise at the AGM, the invaluable work he has done over the last five years. Nigel is stepping down as a Trustee today but I am delighted to announce that Sarah Jane Chimbwandira, Biodiversity Director at SWT has agreed to replace Nigel and continue the valuable relationship we have established with here.

Continuing with the theme of growth and change, the Management Team feel we have reached a new mile stone in our development. Our agendas are getting longer and longer as we have grown and got involved with so many more projects and activities. It is felt that the time is right to divide the responsibilities of the Management Team between the operational work and the strategic leadership that an organisation of our size now needs. Therefore, several of our Trustees are standing down as official Trustees, to concentrate on their operational duties on the Management Team. This will enable those Trustees with strategic skills to really focus in on our corporate responsibilities and delivering on our objectives.

I am extremely grateful to my Finance Committee, who as you can see from their CVs on the website, have impressive commercial experience to guide us safely through our development and keep us legal, corporate and focused on creating an effective charity that supports and promotes the Surrey Hills AONB and potentially in the future, a major funder of the AONB unit as a whole.

I would also like to thank the membership team, under the leadership of Stella Cantor. They all meet every Wednesday at Stella's house and without this group supporting our membership we would cease to function, so thank you for all you do.

Many of you know Rob Fairbanks, the Director of the SHAONB. He and his team are employed through a local authority partnership. The principle funder is Natural England, but with growing pressures on government funding the future is not looking good for protected landscapes like the Surrey Hills. With this in mind, Trustees from the SHS have done a huge amount of work trying to develop new funding models that will make the SHAONB fit for purpose in the future. This has included the formation of a new “not for profit” social enterprise company called Surrey Hills Enterprises. The Parrot pub where we are holding this event today is one of the first members of this new organisation aimed at promoting local produce and businesses that operate in the Surrey Hills. The Surrey Hills Society is the charitable arm giving residents access and involvement with the Surrey Hills and the Enterprises arm does the same job for business.

We are finding enormous synergies with our new sister organisation, which is bringing great benefits to our members. Many of you took advantage of the great Denbies Club Card offer and we plan to bring you many more offers and specials throughout 2014.

One of the best examples of how the charitable arm and the commercial arm are working together this year has been the Wood Fair, held in Bramley last month. This was the first year that the event was run by SHE with

support from SHS and our band of volunteers. The charitable arm not only provided man power but we also managed to attract some grant funding. One of our Trustees, Ken Bare, took over as project manager for the event and I have to say it ran like clockwork, with a 50% increase in visitors, with over 100 stalls and he even managed to book the good weather.

I am extremely grateful to Ken for the hours and hours he puts in for the Society. His organisational skills and energy has really helped the Society to grow and I am extremely grateful to him and his team of volunteers who man our stall at all the summer events and fairs right across the county. In particular, I would like to single out Peter Hattersley again this year, for his invaluable support to Ken – especially because he possesses a car with a trailer tow bar. Our President too has regularly responded to the call for a tow from our events team. Thank you to all of you.

Another area that has grown successfully is our newsletter and I am extremely grateful to Diane Cooper and her band of volunteers for the production of the newsletter. We are extremely grateful to our sponsor, Kier, the new Highways contractor for Surrey County Council, for their continued sponsorship of the newsletter. We must be doing something right because we now have companies approaching us to advertise in the newsletter. We hope in 2014 to make the newsletter even bigger and to be distributed more widely.

You may also notice we now have a regular column in Surrey Life magazine and we have created a new Communications Group with the Marketing officers from the Surrey Hills Board, SHE and SHS. There are more website stories, more press releases and even coverage on local radio and they even got me on a social media course and I can now tweet!

This year we were also asked to be judges in the first Surrey Life Food and Drink Awards that were held at Fox Hills Country Club this week, which Ken and I attended along with the Chairman of Surrey Hills Enterprises, Simon Whalley.

Diane and Ken also led on a project to create a new questionnaire to members to just check we were meeting expectations and were doing what our members wanted. There is often a difference of opinion on the Management Team as to where to place our energies so it is important to occasionally get a reality check from our members. So thank you to all those members who returned their forms and made their valuable comments which we summarised in the last newsletter. Basically, the majority of you think we have got the balance about right and the thing you like best about us is our events programme.

I am afraid I am having to end on a not so positive note. Many of you will be aware of the government's recent announcements on housing numbers and the fact that the greenbelt is under review. But even more worrying has been the statement that National Parks and AONB's are also up for review. The initial impact of this has been felt by Waverley Borough Council in the west of the county, where their Local Plan, which was widely consulted on and categorically showed that residents did not want to accept housing in the greenbelt, was rejected by the Inspector. Even more concerning, Guildford Borough Council last month, launched its new draft local plan which includes proposals to double the size of many of our rural villages and to remove gems of the Surrey Hills like Shere from the greenbelt and the AONB. It includes plans to allow developers to build on iconic landscapes like the base of the hill at St Martha, on the famous North Downs Way and to take all villages along the Tillingbourne Valley, except for some reason Albury, out of greenbelt protection. Another site is the Hogs Back near Guildford. All this proposed development will have a dramatic impact on the AONB. There are various petitions and groups springing up to protest to these plans and the parish councils are all organising local meetings to look at the impact in their specific areas. For example: <http://savehogsback.co.uk>.

Mole Valley will soon be releasing their draft plans, as will all the other planning authorities and I must ask you all to do your utmost to highlight this threat to our beloved AONB to all your friends, family and neighbours. Please write to your MP, write to your borough councillors and your County Councillors to say if you are unhappy that a reduction in the protection for the AONB is being contemplated.

Now, the Society has never been a lobby group and we do not possess any in-house planning expertise. This is where our relationship with the wider Surrey Hills AONB team is very important. I sit on the local authority run partnership, which employs Rob Fairbanks and the Planning consultant, Clive Smith. Many of you will have read Clive's articles in our newsletters which keeps you up to date with planning matters in the AONB – the most controversial one this year being Cherkley Court near Leatherhead, the original home of Lord Beaverbrook, that is now proposed as a golf course and is currently in the High Court.

All the partners on the Board, which includes the National Trust, SWT and CPRE have contributed to the greenbelt debate. CPRE have been invaluable with the information they have provided to us on how we can assist to defend

our protected landscape. Rob Fairbanks has already met with the Head of Planning at Guildford Borough Council and Clive Smith, our planning consultant will be preparing a full submission to the public consultation on this document. I urge you though to watch the papers, follow your local planning authorities, join local petitions and above all write to your elected members to tell them that you are not prepared to sacrifice our beautiful Surrey Hills to the developers in the name of economic growth. The topic is too large and too complexed for me to cover here today but through emails, newsletters and by joining up with other like minded organisations, we will join in the debate and hopefully get politicians to see sense.

Finally, it is with great sadness that I announce the standing down of our Co-ordinator, June Robinson. I know for a fact, that we would not be where we are today without the valuable guidance and sheer hard work that June has given the Society. She has been a key driver in the development of the amazing events programme we have today and her network of contacts and local knowledge and her contagious enthusiasm for her work has enabled us to grow and create a really strong Society.

She has been the "glue" that has held this growing family together and I cannot begin to explain adequately the sincere thanks we all feel for all she has done for us. Her task, as the only paid member of our team was to manage the volunteers and grow the Society in partnership with the Trustees. She has made an outstanding contribution, both working as our consultant, but also all the extra hours she has put in as a member. I thank you on behalf of the Society from the bottom of my heart and we will miss you very, very much. [Give June flowers and present]

I am pleased to say she has agreed not to leave us all together and will stay on as a member. I know she has said she is looking forward to enjoying all the events without any responsibility.

One of June's tasks was actually to eventually make herself redundant. In many ways, by the training up of volunteers and the setting up of all of our procedures she has done just that. The Management Team are currently reviewing the role and setting out our new business plan in the light of all the new developments like the government cuts, the formation of the SHE and other changes. Rob Fairbanks is also currently re-writing the overarching AONB Management Plan, which we will all have the opportunity to comment on in the following few months.

On a more positive note, I would like to ask our President, Neil Maltby, to tell you about another new member to our SHAONB family, the newly formed Surrey Hills Trust.

Neil Maltby- [The aim of the Surrey Hills Landscape Fund is to conserve and enhance the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its local communities by supporting the work of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The Surrey Hills Board develops and promotes the AONB Management Plan and works with local communities, landowners and partner organisations for the benefit of residents, workers and visitors to the Surrey Hills. The Funds generated each year will be used to support projects, programmes and activities identified in the Management Plan and will work closely with Surrey Hills Society and Surrey Hills Enterprises to support each other's work.]

One of my duties today is to present to you the Trustees Report and Financial Statement for the period 1st April 2012 to 31 March 2013. I would like to thank Margaret Brett from Bullimores of Dorking for their continued support, acting as our external examiner. I would also like to thank the National Trust and Surrey Wildlife Trust for their support including the use of their buildings for meetings and also to all the parish councils who support is much appreciated.

There is not enough time here today to thank everyone I should for all the amazing things they do for this wonderful charity, but thank you to all of you. I love working with you, I love meeting all our lovely members and I see nothing but bright skies and opportunities for us in 2014.

Thank you also to the Parrot Pub who are kindly hosting us today. We definitely need more businesses like this in the Surrey Hills. Do make sure you visit the amazing farm shop before you leave and I hope you really enjoy your meal today of local produce, following the AGM.

Chris Howard, Chairman Surrey Hills Society , 2nd November 2013.

