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Surrey Hills National Landscape to expand?

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East Surrey's MP has called on the government to approve the expansion of the county's protected landscapes "as soon as possible".

Claire Coutinho has written to Environment Secretary Dame Angela Eagle to voice her support for the recent review of the Surrey Hills National Landscapes' boundaries.

Formerly known as the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the proposed expansion would see 129 square kilometres of stunning landscape brought under its umbrella.

Ms Coutinho wrote: "We are so lucky in East Surrey to be surrounded by such beautiful countryside – rolling hills, grazing fields, historic woodland.

"I am proud to have helped to secure this long overdue boundary review over six years ago, and it is wonderful to see it has reached this major milestone.

"Countless individuals and groups have poured thousands of hours into this project to get it to where it is today.

"Particular thanks must go to the team at Surrey Hills National Landscape, Tandridge District Council, our local farmers and landowners, and the many other organisations that have been intimately involved in this process from the very beginning."

National Landscapes give designated stretches of countryside additional protections against development under planning laws.

While they receive similar safeguards, they differ from National Parks, which are overseen by separate National Park Authorities.

The new boundaries will see Surrey Hills stretch all the way from Hampshire to parts of Greater London, increasing its size by almost a third.

Areas poised to be brought into the National Landscape include Godstone Hills, Chipstead Valleys and Caterham Woods.

"Protecting our natural environment means cherishing the inheritance entrusted to the current generation by our forebears for the benefit of the next," Ms Coutinho added in her letter.

"This Burkean contract between the living and those yet to be born, through which the protection of our natural landscapes can be preserved, is a core principle many of my constituents hold dear and one that should never be abandoned.

"I therefore hope that, as the Secretary of State responsible, you will consider the proposal with a view to approving it as soon as possible."

Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs spokesperson said: "We know Surrey Hills is loved by its local community and volunteers for its natural beauty, and it is great that so many people care about its future.

"We have received an application from Natural England to extend the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and, as with all applications, will be considering it in due course."

Surrey Hills Board chair Kathy Atkinson previously said she would be writing to Dame Angela to invite her to visit the National Landscape.

She said: "The proposed extension represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to recognise and protect more of the special landscapes that define Surrey Hills and the surrounding area."

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

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Box Hill (Credit: Google Maps)

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