

Surrey Hills now a “National Landscape”

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All designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England and Wales are becoming National Landscapes, including the **Surrey Hills National Landscape**. The new name reflects their national importance; the vital contribution they make to protect the nation from the threats of climate change, nature depletion and the wellbeing crisis, whilst also creating greater understanding and awareness for the work that they do.

This is a significant milestone for the UK and the next step in fully realising the National Landscapes’ vision to be the leading exemplars of how thriving, diverse communities can work with and for nature in the UK: restoring ecosystems, providing food, storing carbon to mitigate the effects of climate change, safeguarding against drought and flooding, whilst also nurturing people’s health and wellbeing.

The Surrey Hills National Landscape was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1958, the second to be designated in the country. It covers around a quarter of Surrey, the most wooded county in England, and is situated within the London Metropolitan Greenbelt with 1.5 million people living within 10km of the landscape. With rising national pressures regarding climate change, the biodiversity emergency the mental health crisis, the Surrey Hills as a National Landscape will better protect precious habitats such as heathland, downland and woodland which are home to important species, as well as providing space for people and nature to thrive.

Kathy Atkinson, Chair of the Surrey Hills National Landscape says:

“There’s often a healthy scepticism around talk of “re-branding” and people might reasonably ask, “What’s the point?” in calling the Surrey Hills a National Landscape instead of an ‘AONB’.

Firstly, the legal status of the Surrey Hills as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is unchanged. This amazing area retains the same protections in law as a National Park. As set out by the Glover review in 2019, AONBs are fragmented, misunderstood and often see even greater pressures with less resource. Glover recommended not only a renaming of ‘AONBs’ to National Landscapes, but the power which could follow in terms of a strengthened network, with increased funding, governance reform, and new shared purposes to help us fight against the challenges our protected landscapes may face.

We need to use this rebrand as a step change to how we connect with our protected landscapes. To excite and engage the widest possible public in the task of protecting the Surrey Hills, a cherished landscape that is under threat like never before. This is a critical decade for our natural world, and National Landscapes brings the opportunity to collectively reduce the impact of substantial threats from a National and localised perspective. So, I urge everyone to embrace our National Landscapes vision as a tool to help us support a healthy and thriving landscape, for nature and for people.”

Text provided by Surrey Hills National Landscape

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