

SURREY HILLS AONB Boundary Review

Submission by



East Horsley
Parish Council

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Chalk embankments running along Chalk Lane, part of the AONB extension we propose.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This document is submitted by East Horsley Parish Council ('EHPC') as part of the stakeholder consultation exercise currently being conducted by the board of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding National Beauty ('AONB') involving a review of the AONB's boundaries.

The AONB is important to East Horsley, accounting for 28% of our total parish area and offering a wide range of recreational activities for many residents. We have therefore considered this boundary review very carefully.

Our findings and the detailed evidence that we have prepared are presented in this document for assessment by the AONB board and its advisers.

Section 2 sets out our recommendations for a Proposed Extension to the AONB in East Horsley, which would increase the total area of AONB within our parish area by some 95 hectares. Our Proposals Map shows the boundary changes we are recommending.

Section 3 provides detailed evidence for our Proposed Extension, including a selection of key photographs and reasoned justification.

Section 4 provides an assessment of our Proposed Extension against the Natural England criteria set out for assessing landscape beauty.

Section 5 presents our overall assessment and conclusion.

2. PROPOSED AONB EXTENSION

The AONB presently covers 207 hectares in the southern part of East Horsley, representing 28% of our total parish area. The predominant landscape form is wooded downland, primarily represented by sections of The Sheepleas, a nature reserve and SSSI owned by Surrey County Council and by parts of Effingham Forest, a commercial woodland area owned by the Forestry Commission.

Compared to our two neighbouring parishes of West Horsley and Effingham, the AONB boundary in East Horsley exhibits a significant enclave. In West Horsley the northern boundary of the AONB extends up to the A246 road. The situation is similar on our eastern side where part of the AONB within Effingham parish also comes close to the A246. However, in East Horsley the AONB boundary is set much further to the south. In consequence we believe that areas of beautiful countryside within East Horsley are being unnecessarily excluded from the AONB.

We propose that this situation should be rectified through the current boundary review and that the northern AONB boundary within East Horsley should be moved further northwards up to the A246.

This Proposed Extension would have the following benefits:

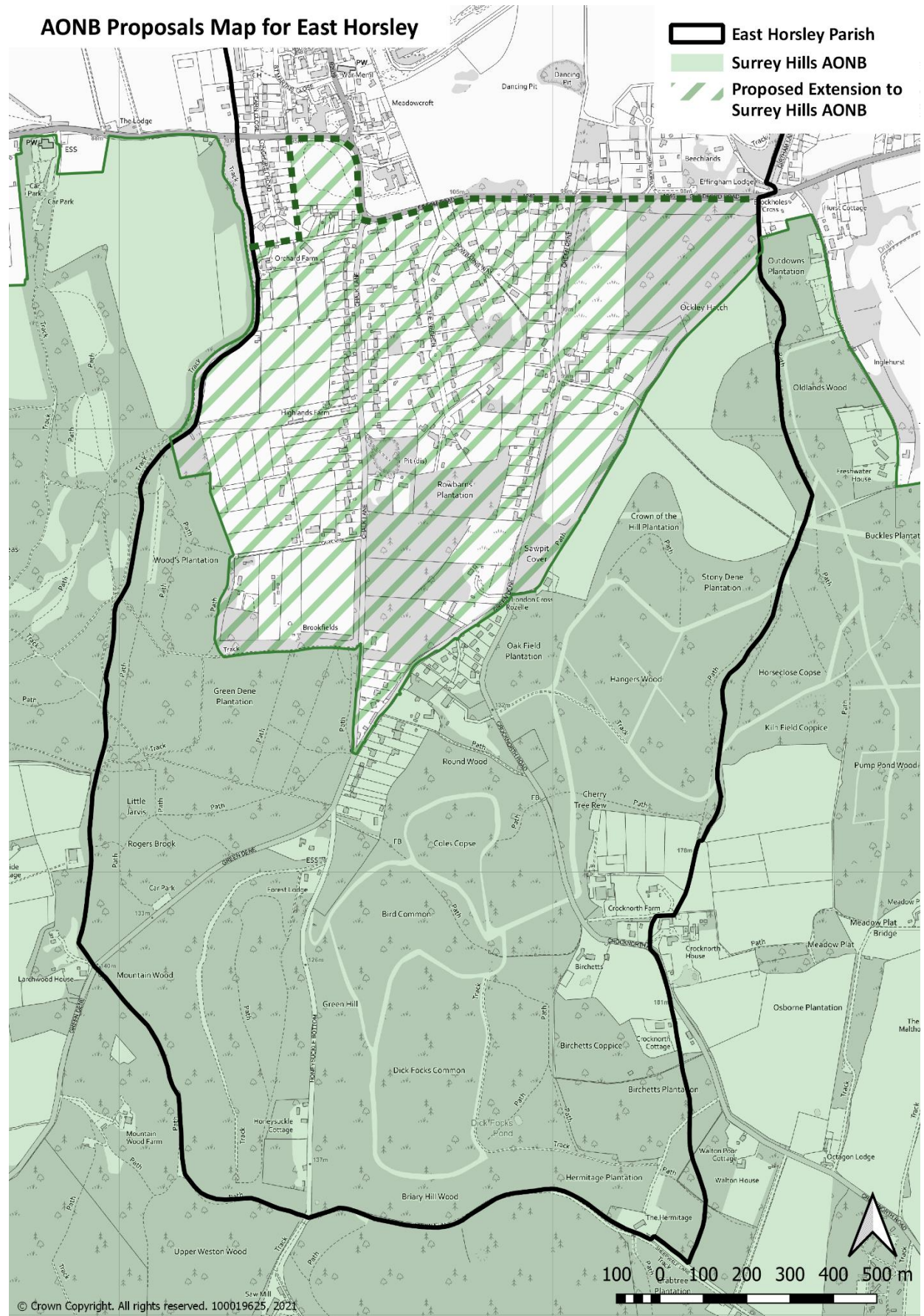
- It will create a clearly defined and identifiable boundary for the AONB across the adjacent parishes of West Horsley, East Horsley and Effingham; and
- It will bring a number of new areas into the East Horsley part of the AONB which have considerable landscape beauty and value;
- These landscape areas will thereafter obtain the benefits of additional protection and connections from being a part of the AONB.

Our Proposed Extension is shown in the Proposals Map overleaf. The total additional area of this Proposed Extension is estimated at approximately 95 hectares.

The new areas to be added to the AONB through the Proposed Extension include the following natural landscape types:

- a) The distinctive sunken chalk lane along the full length of Chalk Lane;
- b) The wildflower meadow reserve of Wellington Meadow;
- c) Open grassland of four small downland farms;
- d) Ancient woodlands of the Rowbarns Manor area;
- e) Mixed woodlands of the Rowbarns Manor area and the Rowbarns Plantation;
- f) Large mature residential gardens of Chalk Lane, Green Dene, Lark Rise, The Warren and Rowbarns Way.

Details of these different landscapes are provided together with supporting photographs in the following section.



3. EVIDENCE

The following pages provide supporting evidence for our Proposed Extension to the AONB including a short description of the component parts of each space with selected photographs and comments on the how the elements of each space would contribute to the beauty of the AONB.

The landscape evidence is organised into four component areas,

- a) Chalk Lane
- b) Wellington Meadow
- c) The downland farms
- d) Rowbarns Manor area

In addition, we have also provided information on two small residential roads, The Warren and Rowbarns Way, since we believe there is a strong case for including these two private rural roads as part of the Proposed Extension.

3.1 Chalk Lane

Chalk Lane is a distinctive single-track road some 1.2km long which runs south from the A246 to connect with the upper section of Green Dene. There is a climb up from the A246 to the short offshoot cul-de-sac of Lark Rise before Chalk Lane descends again down to Green Dene.

For most of its length Chalk Lane is flanked on both sides by high chalk embankments, over 2 metres tall in many places, which give a distinctly gorge-like feeling to this public roadway.

Chalk Lane is lined by low-density rural housing, mostly along its northern section, established from the 1920's onwards. In total there are some 50 homes along Chalk Lane, most having large and mature gardens which provide an important source of biodiversity and create wildlife corridors connecting local sites of ecological importance.

Houses are mainly positioned well above the roadway and in the past driveways have been cut through the embankments to enable owners to drive up to their homes. The result is a crenelated appearance to the chalk embankments, as the photographs below illustrate.

Chalk Lane has a very distinctive, perhaps unique, appearance. Although the North Downs contain other sunken chalk lanes scattered across its length, we are not aware of any comparable road which has the same highly picturesque features seen in Chalk Lane. As the following photographs demonstrate, this is a road which does truly display an 'outstanding natural beauty'.





Chalk Lane, lower section



Chalk Lane, middle section



Chalk Lane, upper section

3.2 Wellington Meadow wildflower reserve

Wellington Meadow represents two hectares of open grassland situated just south of the A246. It is maintained by EHPC as a wildflower meadow, one of the few remaining such reserves in Surrey. It is open to the public who can enjoy the meadow via a circular footpath around its periphery, where information boards are available. The meadow is supported by regular parties of local volunteers.

Several years ago local naturalists identified 140 plant species on Wellington Meadow and 26 species of butterfly – recent sightings of which include Small Heath, Brown Hairstreak and Small Blue. Four types of orchid have also been recorded. A number of scarce invertebrates were seen in recent years such as the bee *A. hattorfiana* and the micro moth *N. cupriacella*.

The natural beauty of the meadow is enhanced by open views over three local landmark buildings – Horsley Towers' gatehouse, Thatcher's Hotel and the 16th century Duke of Wellington pub. The photographs below illustrate the natural beauty of Wellington Meadow in different seasons as well as some of its flora and fauna.





South view



The rare large scabious mining bee



Micro moth



Nemophora cupriacella



Bee orchid

3.3 Downland farms

Behind the rear gardens of the houses on the western side of Chalk Lane lie four small downland farms situated on the open land stretching to the eastern boundary of The Sheepleas. These North Downs grasslands are gently undulating and used for pastoral farming of various kinds. At the northern end is Orchard Farm and Orchard Stud Farm, where horse-breeding and horse-riding activities are found. Further south are Highlands Farm and Kelston Farm where sheep rearing is in evidence.

Poultry Farm lies to the south of Lark Rise - beside it runs a swathe of open grassland, part of The Sheepleas, which stretches southwards to the Green Dene Plantation and the existing AONB. From Lark Rise there are fine views over this open grassland up towards the ridge of the North Downs Way.

In total we estimate these privately-owned downland farms occupy around 16 hectares of open grassland. There is no public access, although the walking trail along the eastern side of The Sheepleas runs behind the rear boundaries of Kelston Farm and Orchard Farm, offering glimpses across these spaces. The following photographs illustrate the landscape form of these downland farms:



Horses graze next to Poultry Farm with the North Downs ridge in the distance, seen from Lark Rise



Sheep grazing at Kelston Farm, seen from The Sheepleas boundary path



Distant view of horses grazing at Orchard Farm, seen from The Sheepleas boundary path

3.4 Rowbarns Manor area

The Proposed Extension includes an area of land directly to the south of the A246, bordered on the west by Green Dene and on the east by Footpath 107, amounting to approximately 21 hectares with Rowbarns Manor at its centre. For convenience we refer to this space as the 'Rowbarns Manor area' although the land now has multiple ownership. The landscape here is a combination of undulating grassland and woodlands, both ancient and mixed. The ancient woodland is limited to an eastern section of the area which is all privately owned and is crossed by a number of permissive footpaths. A section of the public Horsley Jubilee trail (here FP107) also passes through these ancient woodlands.



Ancient woodland beside the Rowbarns Manor area borders the open downland of the AONB.

The woodlands of the Rowbarns Manor area are effectively conserved as a natural woodland reserve by the landowner and generally fallen trees are left to de-compose where they fall. The result is that these woodlands have a very wild and natural feel, which gives an attractive appearance to those walking through them. This approach also supports a rich biodiversity of flora and fauna.



The Rowbarns Manor area includes privately owned woodlands, a wildlife haven for biodiversity



The Horsley Jubilee Trail passes through the ancient woodland of the Rowbarns Manor area.

At the centre of the area is the Rowbarns Manor house, a Grade II listed building from the mid-19th century built in the Lovelace style. Close by are a cluster of heritage buildings, formerly part of the original manor estate but now in separate ownership. These include Rowbarns Cottage (1861) and Rowbarns Grange (1875 with an 16th century core). There are also several other unlisted buildings in the vicinity. The overall effect is an attractive cluster of character buildings nestling within a picturesque downland setting, as illustrated in the photographs below.



Rowbarns Grange & Rowbarns Courtyard with Rowbarns Manor hidden behind



Rowbarns Courtyard



Nearby character cottage

3.5 Residential areas: The Warren & Rowbarns Way

We believe that two small residential rural roads should also be considered within the Proposed Extension, namely The Warren and Rowbarns Way. These are both cul-de-sacs, accessible from a common entrance off the A246 Guildford Road. The Warren contains 28 homes, many of them distinctive character houses of high quality. Rowbarns Way contains 10 homes with a similar mixture of character and modern houses. Both are private roads although a public footpath (FP106) connects the end of Rowbarns Way with Green Dene close to the entrance gate into Rowbarns Manor.

Most houses in these roads have large and mature gardens, which contribute significantly to local biodiversity – the Greater Butterfly orchid was found by a resident in his garden in The Warren several years ago. The area also contains many mature trees in both the gardens and along the leafy frontages. Despite their proximity to the A246, these roads exude a quiet elegance within their tranquil rural setting.

The reasons we propose these areas should be included within the AONB extension are:

- a) Their inclusion adds simplicity and integrity to the AONB boundary in this area;
- b) There is high degree of beauty to these local street scenes;
- c) These homes and gardens represent an integral part of the local rural and ecological environment of the area.



Street scene view in The Warren



The Warren: character house

Rowbarns Way turning area



Rowbarns Way character home



4. ASSESSMENT OF NATURAL BEAUTY

Six factors are set out by Natural England for assessing the natural beauty of landscapes intended for national designation, as referred to in the Surrey Hills AONB consultation paper. In this section we consider each of these factors in turn with respect to our Proposed Extension for the AONB in the East Horsley parish:

a) Landscape quality

A measure of the current physical state or condition of the landscape and its features.

We believe all of the four main landscapes of our Proposed Extension can be considered to show the highest quality in terms of the physical condition of the landscape and its features:

Chalk Lane	The most dominant landscape feature of the Proposed Extension is the sunken chalk embankments of Chalk Lane, which although hundreds of years old are now maintained as needed by individual house-owners. The public highway is well maintained and in good order;
Wellington Meadow	Maintained by EHPC to a high standard, supported by regular volunteer work groups;
Downs Farms	The downland farms are working establishments in a landscape of undulating grassland. These farms are functional establishments which meet the normal standards appropriate for their operations;
Rowbarns Manor	The woodlands of the Rowbarns Manor area are privately owned and well-maintained with public footpaths kept in good order. In the woodland areas, there is a policy favouring natural wilding which gives an unspoiled and un-tamed appearance to these woods, where there are also a range of permissive footpaths.

b) Scenic quality

The extent to which the landscape appeals to the senses (primarily, but not only, the visual senses).

All of the four main landscapes appeal to the senses in different ways:

Chalk Lane	A highly picturesque natural landscape with stunning visual features. A unique and special place which evolves with the seasons;
Wellington Meadow	A beautiful grassland area functioning as a wildlife meadow and appealing to sight, smell and touch. The visual appeal is enhanced by views of the adjacent heritage buildings;
Downs Farms:	Remote rolling grasslands, whose scenic appearance is punctuated by agreeable views of grazing livestock.

Rowbarns Manor: A walk through the wild woodlands of the Rowbarns Manor area appeals to the senses through the unfolding of a variety of tree types and forms - young, old and dead – seemingly different with each twist of the footpaths and the changing of the seasons.

c) Relative wildness

The degree to which relatively wild character can be perceived in the landscape and makes a particular contribution to sense of place.

All of the four main landscapes have a wildness to their character which makes them very special places:

Chalk Lane: Chalk Lane is the product of centuries of natural development, clear in every gnarled root clinging to the chalk embankments, where wild orchid grow and red kites hover above. It is a public highway, so there is order, but there is also an edge to this character. Not a place for the squeamish to walk at night.

Wellington Meadow: The wild side of its character is demonstrated by the large range of insects and plants which make their homes in this wildflower meadow.

Downs Farms: These are working farms, so order is a requisite, but the sense of wildness is felt in the secluded remoteness of these hillside places with hardly a person in sight across the undulating natural grassland;

Rowbarn Manor: The woodlands around the Rowbarns Manor area are wild intriguing places where nature is left to take its own course.

d) Relative tranquillity

The degree to which relative tranquillity can be perceived in the landscape.

All of the four main landscapes demonstrate relative tranquillity in their different ways:

Chalk Lane Anyone venturing along Chalk Lane up to the high point of Lark Rise will immediately experience a sense of quiet tranquillity and remoteness, even though the shops of Bishopsmead Parade are scarcely a mile away;

Wellington Meadow This wildflower meadow sits beside the busy A246, so silence is scarcely an option here and yet sitting alone on the bench in the middle of this meadow, focusing on the bees, butterflies and wildflowers, the sounds of nearby traffic can seem to disappear;

Downs Farms	These remote private farms, restricted to the public, are inherently places of solitude and quietness nestling on the gentle slopes of the downs.
Rowbarns Manor	The woodlands of the Rowbarns Manor area are very quiet places. On a typical stroll through these woods you might meet perhaps one or two people, typically out walking with their dogs, and also maybe the occasionally horse-rider, but mostly this is a place of tranquil solitude.

e) Natural heritage features

The influence of natural heritage on the perception of the natural beauty of the area. Natural heritage includes flora, fauna, geological and physiographical features.

All four landscapes are influenced by natural heritage features to a very considerable extent.

Chalk Lane	The sunken lane is the product of a specific geological formation worn down by natural and man-made forces over centuries.
Wellington Meadow	The meadow exists because of the mixed layering of chalk and clay strata on the lower slopes of the North Downs.
Downs Farms:	Further up the hillside the grassland areas of the downland farms support pastoral grazing as a consequence of the chalk strata.
Rowbarn Manor	The ancient and mixed woodlands fringed by rolling downs are enhanced by the presence of chalk-and-flint faced 19 th century heritage buildings in the local Lovelace style, helping to enhance the beautiful landscape setting.

f) Cultural heritage

The influence of cultural heritage on the perception of natural beauty of the area and the degree to which associations with particular traditions, people, artists, writers or events in history contribute to such perception.

It is difficult to assess this specific criterion for these landscapes. Ada Lovelace, the 19th century mathematical pioneer and daughter of Lord Byron, lived in Horsley Towers a hundred yards away from Chalk Lane – maybe she found inspiration wandering amongst its chalk embankments, but sadly the records do not mention it!

5. CONCLUSIONS

Our assessment of the Natural England criteria for assessing the natural beauty of a landscape, as shown in Chapter 4, is summarised in the following table:

	SUMMARY LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT			
	Chalk Lane	Wellington Meadow	Downs farms	Rowbarns Manor
Landscape quality	High	High	High	High
Scenic quality	High	High	Medium	High
Wildness	High	High	High	High
Tranquillity	High	Medium	High	High
Natural heritage	High	High	High	High
Cultural heritage	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
OVERALL	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH

Based upon our evaluation of the six Natural England criteria for assessing the beauty of landscapes, we conclude that each of the four main areas of our Proposed Extension rank HIGH in terms of their natural beauty, albeit with different attributes across the four main landscape areas.

Accordingly, we believe that our Proposed Extension meets with the standards required for it to be classified as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

East Horsley Parish Council

17th January 2022