



SURREY HILLS AONB BOUNDARY

Draft Submission for West Horsley Parish Council

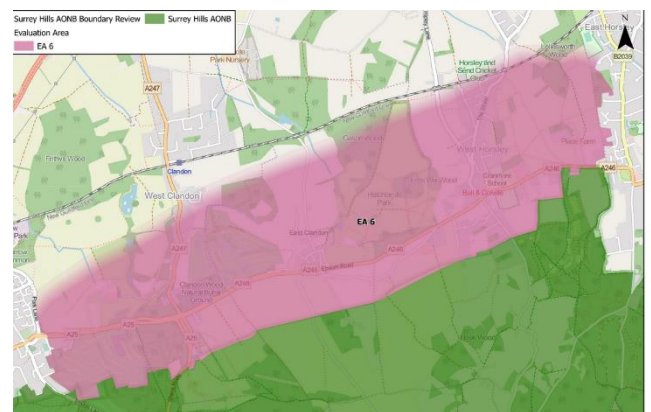
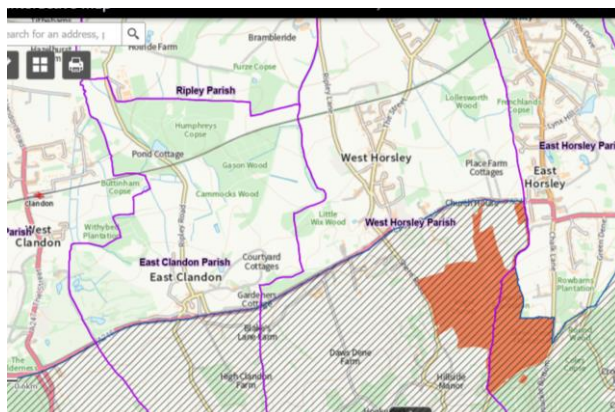
INTRODUCTION

Natural England has appointed consultants to undertake the assessments required for the boundary review. The project begins with a 'call for evidence' to gather a range of data and information in a structured way which addresses the specific technical requirements of the formal assessment process.

The following set of factors relating to natural beauty will be used for assessing landscapes for national designation.

1. Landscape quality - This is a measure of the current physical state or condition of the landscape and its features.
2. Scenic quality - The extent to which the landscape appeals to the senses (primarily, but not only, the visual senses).
3. Relative wildness - The degree to which relatively wild character can be perceived in the landscape and makes a particular contribution to sense of place.
4. Relative tranquillity - The degree to which relative tranquillity can be perceived in the landscape.
5. 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.
6. 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.

The maps below show the current and suggested extension to the Surrey Hills Boundary as they relate to West Horsley.



Here follows West Horsley Parish Council's first draft submission for discussion and comment.

1. LANDSCAPE QUALITY

West Horsley is an historic semi-rural village situated at the foot of the Surrey Hills, with approximately 50% of the Parish already located within the boundary of the Surrey Hills AONB.

One of the distinctive and defining characteristics of the Parish is the open outlook with views across open countryside. The area is particularly popular with walkers, cyclists and other outdoor activities, facilitated by a number of public footpaths, woodland areas and spectacular walks and views. The general semi-rural character of West Horsley supports a range of land uses, notably arable and sheep farming, with open fields punctuated by mature hedgerows and parkland areas, which contribute significantly to the biodiversity of the area as a whole.

The topography is of gently rolling hills, incorporating small streams, ponds and drainage channels which are a feature of the heavy London clay on which the village is situated.

There are also fine views, notably from the Millenium Point viewpoint located within the Sheepleas Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI), from which several notable Central London landmarks are visible, and looking West from Long Reach towards the North Downs.

The population of West Horsley was estimated at 2800 persons in 2018, with a total of circa 1100 dwellings, which has grown marginally since that date and is anticipated to experience significant growth over the next 5 years as a result of several large housing developments which have recently received planning consent.

There is a conservation area in the middle of the village with a number of striking houses dating back to the 17th century, with the post-war housing areas lying to the North of the railway bridge which spans the main arterial road (The Street /East Lane) around which most of the village is centred.

There are 2 principal Country Estates worthy of mention, namely West Horsley Place and the Hatchlands Estate. The former is a Grade 1 mediaeval manor house of great beauty and significance which dates back to 1425 and comprises a 380-acre estate laid partly to formal gardens with a large, wooded area to the rear, which extends as far as the Guildford-Waterloo railway line. This is an area of great ecological interest. Adjoining the main estate is the recently constructed Grange Opera House which has proved a huge success with operagoers.

The latter, Hatchlands Park, is one of the largest country estates in the South East, with over 400 acres of rolling parkland and woodland. The imposing Georgian building was originally designed by Robert Adam, and the estate is run by the National Trust and is always busy with walkers and visitors to the house and grounds.

These 2 estates currently lie outside the boundary of the Surrey Hills AONB but contribute hugely to the rural amenity, ecology, and biodiversity of the area. Both are located South of the A 246 Epsom Road, and with West Horsley Place extending North to the natural barrier of the railway line it would seem to be a logical and appropriate extension of the AONB boundary to incorporate them and the area surrounding to include historic features as the Village Green with its iconic oak tree and the Village orchard.

2. SCENIC QUALITY - Extent to which the landscape appeals to the senses

“a combination of the natural features that provide the basic pattern of landscape, the cultural elements that are superimposed on this and are more fluid, reflecting social and land use changes over time, and the observer’s position within the landscape.”

The landscape seen within the eastern parish boundary is classified as rural and is the site of West Horsley Place (A 14th Century Manor House) & The Ancient Wood. The open fields and wooded areas border the full length of this side of the Village. This offers a true sense of an open and calm accessible countryside village which is enjoyed by locals and visitors alike. The Woods are also home to the Opera house with Walled Gardens supporting the feel of calm, beauty, and tranquillity of the area. The vibrancy and scenic views on this side of the village are exceptional and are unique to the village of West Horsley.

The landscape towards the western parish boundary, also classified as rural, boasts a beautiful farmland, rural housing and fields bordering onto The Hatchlands National Trust Estate. This runs along the majority of the length of the upper side of the with many different floral and tree species. These slopes of the Surrey hills continue the feel of wide-open spaces throughout the village and across the landscape views of spectacular sunsets can be seen. The Wind blows down from the hills awashing the village with a cool fresh breeze from the south.

The central section of this linear village, The Street, is area of medium density residential development, as well the Village Hall and Church which are all sandwiched between the present AONB Area and the railway line. Many of the historic timber framed properties found within the area are listed, and the presence of this number of historic timber-framed dwellings, together with a High Archaeological Potential designation by Surrey County Council shows off this area’s historical status.

There are natural springs running throughout the centre of the village which is why stunning willow trees throughout the village are plentiful. This part of the village has a wide variety of indigenous plants as well as large trees within residential gardens and in our Village Orchard. The Orchard’s varied produce is free to all in the village. At the centre of the village is the 500-year oak situation on village green which is stunning in winter as well as summer. The sense of history, longevity and beautiful, lush vegetation within the Village is loved and enjoyed by all in the community. The Parish Council’s environmental initiatives support the village ethos.

3. RELATIVE WILDNESS

The requirement for an extended AONB boundary is that it should be both defensible and definable. The parish boundary must surely be an ideal boundary since it is defined as a legal boundary within the county.

There are several areas not currently included in the AONB which could be defined and described as relative wildernesses. Many of these areas are clearly identified in the West Horsley Neighbourhood Plan.

- The area north of the A246 includes the Conservation Area (see Page 61 in The Neighbourhood Plan) and the considerable acreage of West Horsley Place. In that area, there is a maze of footpaths and bridleways which almost by definition are relatively unspoilt and wild. This

includes several areas of ancient woodland, most particularly Lollesworth Wood reference TQ 0879 5429. Also worth noting here is the ancient woodland area known as Little Wix Wood in the National Trust Hatchlands Park estate. Also nearby is the West Horsley Village Orchard TQ 0776 5279.

- North of the railway line and towards Green Lane there is the man-made woodland Ben's Wood TQ 0807 5484, the new SANG TQ 0781 5446 and the Caravanning and Camping Club campsite with its lake TQ 0823 5514.
- West of Long Reach and bounded by the Parish boundary and bridleway 73, TQ 0722 5374 is an extensive area of agricultural land TQ 0740 5418, with stunning open views across Surrey countryside from the SANG. Please note that Green Lane West, part of the Parish boundary is itself a track (BOAT 537)

4. RELATIVE TRANQUILITY

I have been asked to write a piece on relative tranquillity and what that means to the West Horsley community. I thought the easiest way to do this was to look up the dictionary meaning of the word.

The definition of tranquillity in the Oxford English Dictionary is: the quality or state of being tranquil; calm. "Passing cars are the only noise that disturbs the tranquillity of rural life."

This is obviously very difficult to put into words, so I have included several pictures taken in West Horsley over the past year to demonstrate this, they do say that pictures portray 1000 words.

At the beginning of 2021 we had an unprecedented snowfall in the area and during that time I was out walking with my dog and took these wonderful pictures in Hatchlands. Unfortunately, the serenity and calm cannot be captured in a photograph but the beautiful woodland setting, and emptiness can.

In spring the picture changes to bring new life and amazing colour to the surrounding rural areas of West Horsley that can only enhance an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty such as the Surrey Hills. In summer the green and peacefully setting of the surrounding fields in the area are improved by the blue skies and dappled shade of the old and magnificent trees in the village.

Even as summer turns to Autumn there is still plenty of wildlife around to enjoy the tranquil setting and go about their business in the woods and as winter returns once more the beauty, peace and allure remain.

What does relative tranquillity mean to me as a resident of West Horsley. I moved to West Horsley from southwest London 10 years ago and was drawn in by the semi-rural location of West Horsley and the proximity to the Surrey Hills being an area that I could enjoy the outdoor life and green surroundings. Over the years and with the change to the green belt these areas are becoming less and less in our village, and we need to preserve these to ensure future generations can enjoy similar settings and surroundings. To become part of the Surrey Hills AONB would enable this and allow West Horsley to remain the tranquil semi-rural location I fell in love with. To close I thought I would include one final picture in which the engraving on the back rest sums up what the village means to so many perfectly.

5. CULTURAL HERITAGE

The extended area would include the important Grade 1 listed property **West Horsley Place** which, following the death of Mary, Duchess of Roxburghe, was transferred to a Charitable Trust. **West Horsley Place Trust** objectives are *'To preserve and maintain the house known as West Horsley Place in Surrey, together with its ancillary buildings and grounds as a place of historic and architectural interest, setting its history in a wider local and national context through a variety of teaching and learning methods. To encourage and promote the performing and visual arts.'*

On land within the curtilage of West Horsley Place a new Opera House was built 2016/17 known as 'The Theatre in the Woods' where **Grange Park Opera** performs a summer season. This includes new works such as 'The Life and Death of Alexander Litvinenko' as well as performances by their Primary Schools group known as *'The Primary Robins'*.

Unusually for historic houses, visitors to West Horsley Place are encouraged to touch and look at any object unless specifically requested not to do so.

In November 2021 West Horsley Place hosted in partnership with **'Surrey Hills Enterprises'** the first **'Surrey Hills Christmas Fair'** which gave visitors a unique opportunity to see and buy the best of Surrey Hills arts, crafts, artisanal produce, food and drink in the beautiful setting of West Horsley Place.

6. NATURAL HERITAGE

The suggested extension of the Surrey Hills AONB includes areas of Natural Heritage value. West Horsley Parish Council would recommend that this extension is further expanded north to include such sites.

We list below various areas:

- Lollesworth Wood, an ancient woodland and Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) which lies on either side of the Waterloo to Guildford via Cobham railway line, part of the West Horsley Place Estate, and the Parkrow Copse SNCI adjacent to the southern part of Lollesworth Wood.
- The medieval fishponds within that part of Lollesworth Wood that lies to the south of the railway line.
- The Grade II Humphrey Repton designed park land at Hatchlands Park, a National Trust property lying between the A246 and the railway line. This includes, within the West Horsley Parish boundary, Little Wix Wood which is a notable local and much visited bluebell wood.
- Aside from the above mentioned bluebell wood there is an abundance of native flora to be found within the suggested boundary extension and to the north of the railway line but lying within the West Horsley Parish Boundary including: early purple orchids, lobularis narcissus (Lenten Lillies otherwise native daffodils), primroses, wood anemone, cowslips and large drifts of snowdrops and aconite within the grounds of Dene Place, a property on the Hatchlands Park Estate, now a BUPA Nursing Home but previously the Dower House of Hatchlands.
- The formal walled gardens at West Horsley Place particularly the northern Crinkle Crankle or serpentine wall, together with the walled orchard which amongst its old heritage fruit trees there is an old mulberry tree.

- An abundance of various fauna can be found, for example on the new SANG known as Horsley Meadows north of the railway line, skylarks, one possibly two pairs of nesting red kites, sparrowhawks and kestrels. There are bats, numerous foxes and badgers, roe deer and muntjac.

In the preparation of the West Horsley Neighbourhood Plan a local naturalist provided a report identifying many species of butterfly and moths found in the Parish. (See Neighbourhood Plan)

NOTE TO READERS

For the purpose of this briefing note most of the illustrations have been removed. Maps, illustrations and photographs will be collated, labelled and redistributed in a way that best supports our submission, without gaps or unnecessary duplication.

WHPC

January 2022