

Compton PC Local Plan Sub Committee Report - March 2021

Surrey Hills AONB Boundary Review

Natural England has announced this week that it will be proceeding with the Surrey Hills AONB Boundary Review this year. Before undertaking the formal process, the Surrey Hills review will focus on early engagement with parish councils and other key stakeholders to identify areas of sufficient natural beauty to be included in the review.

In 2016, Compton PC, together with Worplesdon and Wanborough PCs commissioned an independent landscape assessment of Blackwell Farm, which concluded that the vast majority of the area merited AONB status should be included in the review. Former Guildford MP Anne Milton submitted the assessment to Natural England on the parishes' behalf.

Recommended action

Whilst it is likely that Natural England will not consider any land that has been earmarked for development in an adopted local plan, the Local Plan Sub Committee recommends that Compton Parish Council puts forward a request that the whole of Blackwell Farm is included in the boundary review.

A3 widening

As you are aware, the A3 widening scheme, on which much of the Local Plan was predicated, has been dropped from the Government's Road Investment Strategy. Blackwell Farm was one of the sites that GBC said could not come forward without this piece of infrastructure. This leaves the developer (the University of Surrey) with two options:

1. To push for the A3 widening scheme to be reinstated in the Government's Road Investment Strategy. Cllr John Rigg (Lead Councillor for Major Projects) is already lobbying for this and has written to MPs on the matter. Highways England has also confirmed that it would resubmit the widening scheme to the government "if it was deemed necessary".
2. To mitigate the lack of capacity on the A3 (potentially by providing additional roads on and off the site). This presents problems to the University:
 - a. a route west (through Flexford) would be nonsense in planning terms, requiring drivers to travel a long distance away from Guildford and then to use other very congested roads back into town;
 - b. a route north (through Wood St Village) would involve crossing a railway line and common land (requiring an Act of Parliament). Both routes would involve buying land from third parties and both would create additional congestion on the A323.
 - c. An upgraded road system on the northern approach to the Blackwell Farm site (Gill Avenue and Egerton Road). Cllr John Rigg stated at the recent Scrutiny and Overview Committee that this would take years and cost millions of pounds.