

Compton Parish Council Local Plan Sub-Committee Report – May 2023

Surrey Hills AONB boundary review

Natural England/DEFRA has formally opened the consultation on the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) boundary review. The consultation period is until 13th June. The main access webpage is <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/ne-landscape-heritage-and-geodiversity-team/s/>. This leads to a Boundary Review website at <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/ne-landscape-heritage-and-geodiversity-team/surrey-hills-boundary-variation/consultation/intro/>.

Consultation Map 1 shows that the proposed AONB boundary would be extended to include more land north of the A31. On the map it looks as though Blackwell Farm is included in the proposed extension, but the Consultation Report shows that it isn't. This makes clear on page 12 that the land at Blackwell Farm is just as good as the land to the west and merits AONB status, but has been excluded because it has been allocated for development within Guildford Borough Council's Local Plan. The AONB extension goes well beyond the 'Area of Search', but does not include all the land proposed for inclusion in the AONB by Land Management Services for Compton PC.

On the advice of Stephen Rudd, who is coordinating the review, Compton PC will be resubmitting the document that was prepared as part of NE's public engagement exercise. The PC will also be asking NE for provision to be made for land which meets the AONB criteria to be included in the new boundary should it not come forward for development within a defined period.

Solar Farm at Chalk-Pit farm

The Consultation Report on the AONB boundary review makes it clear that the land proposed for the solar installation at Chalk Pit Farm has been included in the proposed extension for the AONB. Despite Natural England's own consultant concluding that this land merits AONB status, Natural England has not formally objected to the planning application. There is a risk that without this objection, the planning application will be approved and that this will prevent this land (and the land adjacent to it (to the west)) from becoming AONB.

The Local Plan Sub-Committee has written to Natural England on behalf of Compton PC to ask if it might reconsider its position. The Chair of the Local Plan Sub-Committee and Cllr Nagaty also met with GBC Case Officer Kelly Jethwa on April 20 to raise Compton PC's concerns.

On April 20, the chairman of the Local Plan Sub-Committee and Cllr Nagaty met with Ms Jethwa (via 'Teams') to discuss the proposed solar farm at Chalk-Pit Farm. As to be expected, Ms Jethwa stated that she had not yet reached a conclusion on the planning application. However, she made three points of interest:

- i) GBC has commissioned an independent landscape architect to evaluate the landscape visual impact of the scheme.
- ii) The 'Alternative Sites' document has been sent back to the University for a re-write as it is not considered 'robust'.
- iii) GBC has brought on board an additional external planning officer to help with this application. This external advisor has experience in planning applications relating to solar farms.