

Re: Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Boundary Review - campaign to include all of Chelsham and Farleigh parish in an extension of the nearby Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The Friends of Selsdon Wood (FSW) submitted a request in the first round of the enquiry about the enlargement of Surrey Hills AONB for that wood to be included in this area. We were disappointed that our request was not accepted within the recommendations put forward for the new boundaries.

We understand there is now a review of those decisions being conducted by Natural England which aims to extend the boundary of the Surrey Hills Area to cover adjacent high-value countryside. This will provide extra protection to the countryside included and will recognise its natural qualities and value. We know that Chelsham and Farleigh Parish Council (PC) have been campaigning to be included in an extension. This would mean that Selsdon Wood could be reached from the AONB and should also be included.

FSW agree with Chelsham and Farleigh PC that Natural England has not done justice to the rest of our area, compared to the other ones it has already accepted for inclusion in locations north of the M25. Therefore, we now seek an extension reaching to the Green Belt boundaries that already define the boundary of Chelsham and Farleigh PC and also include Selsdon Wood, particularly now we are aware of the leasing of Elm Farm on Farleigh Common to Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) and that re-wilding is planned for that location under SWT management. That farmland extends to Kings Wood and is very close to the old Selsdon Park estate which has also been re-wilded in recent years.

FSW understood that the Surrey Hills Board agreed with the propositions we and Chelsham and Farleigh PC had put forward in the recent consultation stage. The Board thought that Selsdon Nature Reserve should also be included in any extension.

In view of the fact that Natural England appear to attach weight to the strength of local feeling, FSW, which has a large subscribing membership and nigh on 2000 Facebook followers, would like to make the following points so that Selsdon Wood is included in the AONB.

1. The Surrey Hills National Landscape Board argued that our parish complements the existing AONB, and that the existing border of the parish Green Belt would provide a clearly defined boundary of a new extension including within it the whole parish along with Hutchinson's Bank Nature Reserve and Selsdon Wood Nature Reserve, both clearly defined in the landscape;
2. The parish contains two Conservation Areas, one of which is now going to be managed by SWT, which is Farleigh Common (Elm Farm as mentioned above), containing a nationally rare priority acid grass habitat;
3. Selsdon Wood mirrors the ancient woodlands in the parish, whose patchwork of fields and woodlands is well-documented as being medieval in layout. The wood was historically used as a hunting ground by the Archbishops of Canterbury and royalty and also as a workplace for charcoal burners and the location of decoys in WW2.

4. Large parts of these fields and woodland in Farleigh formed part of a founding bequest to Merton College, and hence the creation of the University of Oxford. They have been owned by Merton College since 1264, which has just signed a 35-year lease with the Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) to manage Great Farleigh Green Conservation Area and the land on which Elm Farm has developed. The college will provide extremely reliable management and care of the area over time.
5. The inclusion of Chelsham and Farleigh Parishes would connect well with the existing AONB along Clarke's Lane to the south, and also with Woldingham Parish to the west, much of which latter was included as an extension at the outset of the current review. For example, the new proposed Beddlestead Valley extension to the AONB is close to Ficklehole Conservation Area.
6. The addition in this area of Beddlestead Valley is insufficient. We believe that much more of the landscape beyond this single landform should be included. In particular, FSW would advocate, as recommended by the Surrey Hills National Landscape Board at the last consultation stage, the inclusion of the ancient woods, fields and other scenic areas to the north and east of it viz. Selsdon Wood, King's Wood, Hutchison's Bank and the countryside of the Chelsham and Farleigh parishes.
7. Footpaths through Selsdon Wood etc link easily with the paths to all these neighbouring areas so it seems only logical that they are all within the one AONB.
8. As was pointed out in the last consultation stage by the Surrey Hills NL Board, this general area is accessible to a very large population, much larger than more remote AONB landscapes, and therefore – if preserved – it will provide a much larger public benefit to the populations in proximity to the northwards towards London. It is a great surprise to visitors that there are no buildings to mar the view of this rural area so close to suburban Croydon. The habitat needs to be preserved to be enjoyed and used by the community to gain knowledge of the natural world in an ever expanding 'concrete zone'.
9. The Surrey Hills NL Board also pointed out the danger that Surrey might end up with insufficient protected, high-value landscape as a result of a review that failed to include enough AGLV, given that AGLV status will disappear from all areas not included in the new AONB boundary. Selsdon Wood is such an area as it is on a continuation of the characteristic dry chalk grasslands of the existing AONB. Therefore, again, to appear to value the wood less than its neighbours by excluding it from a slightly larger AONB, seems illogical.

FSW hope that the decision exclude Chelsham and Farleigh Parishes and, at least, Selsdon Wood in any extension of the AONB boundaries can be changed.

You can see further information about the group and the wood on the FSW website <https://www.friendsofselsdonwood.co.uk>

From: Heather Govier, Chair

Friends of Selsdon Wood

28th November 2024