

# **Guildford Residents Association**

## **Consultation Response:**

### **Surrey Hills AONB Boundary Review**



GRA welcomes the proposed expansion of the Surrey Hills AONB.

While we welcome the proposed inclusion of additional areas in the vicinity of Guildford, we consider that the proposed boundary does not extend far enough and fails to include areas that merit designation.

We further consider a crucial opportunity is being missed to incorporate areas of high landscape quality in their own right that can also serve to bring the AONB closer to more people in Guildford. Connecting designated areas with people where landscape criteria are met is a stated objective for other AONB boundary reviews, where extension towards London is proposed to be desirable.

We welcome the inclusion of what is currently a valley gap south of Guildford.

We welcome the inclusion of land to the east of Guildford in the vicinity of Hatchlands and East Clandon and to the north of the A31 Hogs Back.

We consider that the following areas merit inclusion and invite further consideration:

- Land within the Evaluation Areas EA2, 3, 4, 5 and 6
- All land within the AGLV
- Land to the north of Evaluation Areas EA2 and EA6 including Thames Basin Heathland
- Specific, small parcels of land adjoining Guildford that now strongly merit designation
- Green fingers along the Wey corridor that strongly merit designation for their natural beauty and provide a sustainable, landscape connection between Guildford and scenic setting.

## **1) West of Guildford**

While greatly welcoming the proposed inclusion of land to the north of the A31 Hogs Back, we consider the EA2 area of search to the west and north west of Guildford to have been insufficiently extensive.

The mosaic of rolling wooded farmland and heathland that extends beyond EA2 is of great landscape and scenic quality, offers a rich cultural heritage and is of acknowledged natural heritage importance. The combination of woodland and heathland makes an important contribution to a sense of escape, immersion in nature and, hence, wildness.

Areas of land on the northern slopes of the greensand ridge exhibit the natural beauty and special qualities that characterise the Surrey Hills AONB to the south and that extending the boundary to the north to areas of the Thames Basin Heaths would appropriately include landscapes that in cultural heritage, landscape and ecological terms are comparable to any within the AONB at present. Several of these areas have direct visual connection to other parts of the AONB and represent missing components in the understanding of the quality of this outstanding landscape.

We also invite Natural England to consider the importance for natural beauty of heathland to the north. The heathland within the military training areas has escaped the effects of intensive farming and, as a result, is an area of acknowledged wildlife importance which is also of high scenic quality. Issues relating to compatibility between military training and opportunity for enjoyment and understanding of natural beauty are not an issue in relation to AONB designation.

Indicative lines on the map below demonstrate some well documented areas to the north of area EA2 that we consider should be included within the extended AONB boundary to the north west of Guildford. The blue lines are NOT proposed AONB boundaries and we are not proposing isolated outlier areas are designated. Rather we are highlighting some areas for inclusion within a broader extension based on assessment.

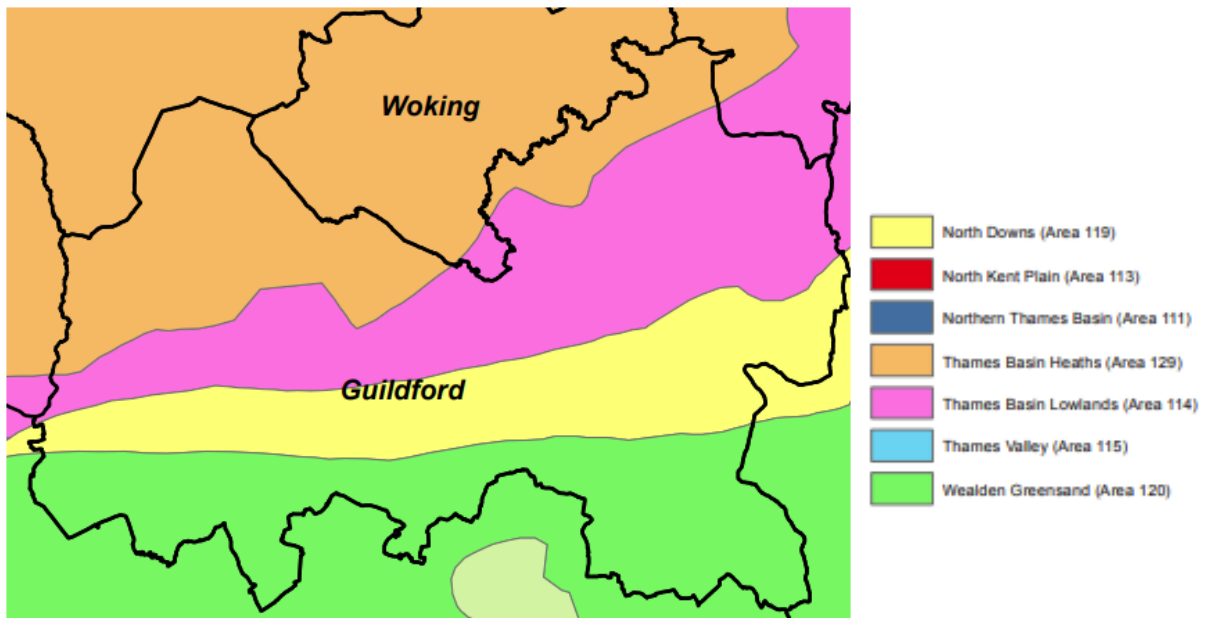




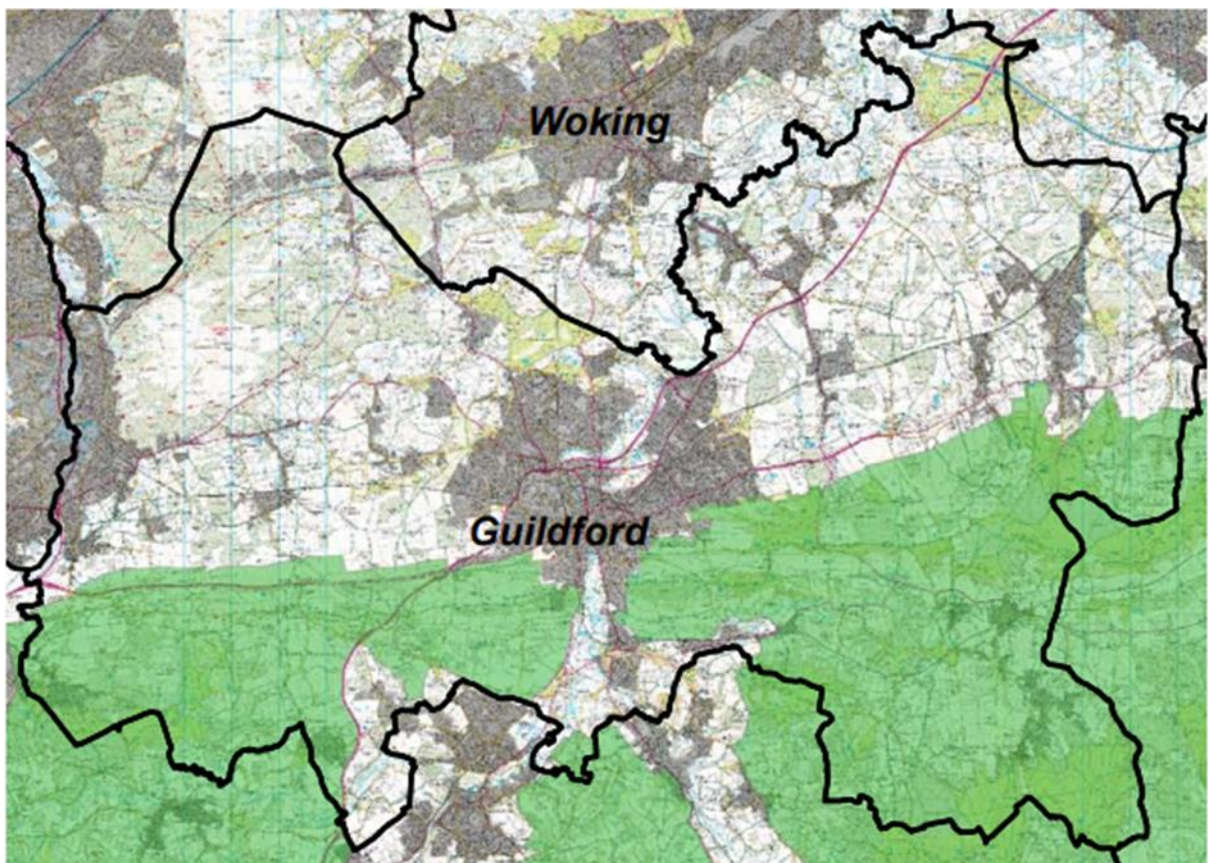
We submit that, with hindsight, the original Surrey Hills AONB designated area gave insufficient attention to the natural beauty of lowland heath and rolling countryside with historical estates that extends beyond the chalk and greensand of the downs. The Thames Basin Heaths have since been recognised from a biodiversity perspective: their landscape and scenic qualities have not yet been recognised. This review is an opportunity to rectify this omission.



**Natural England Character Areas:**



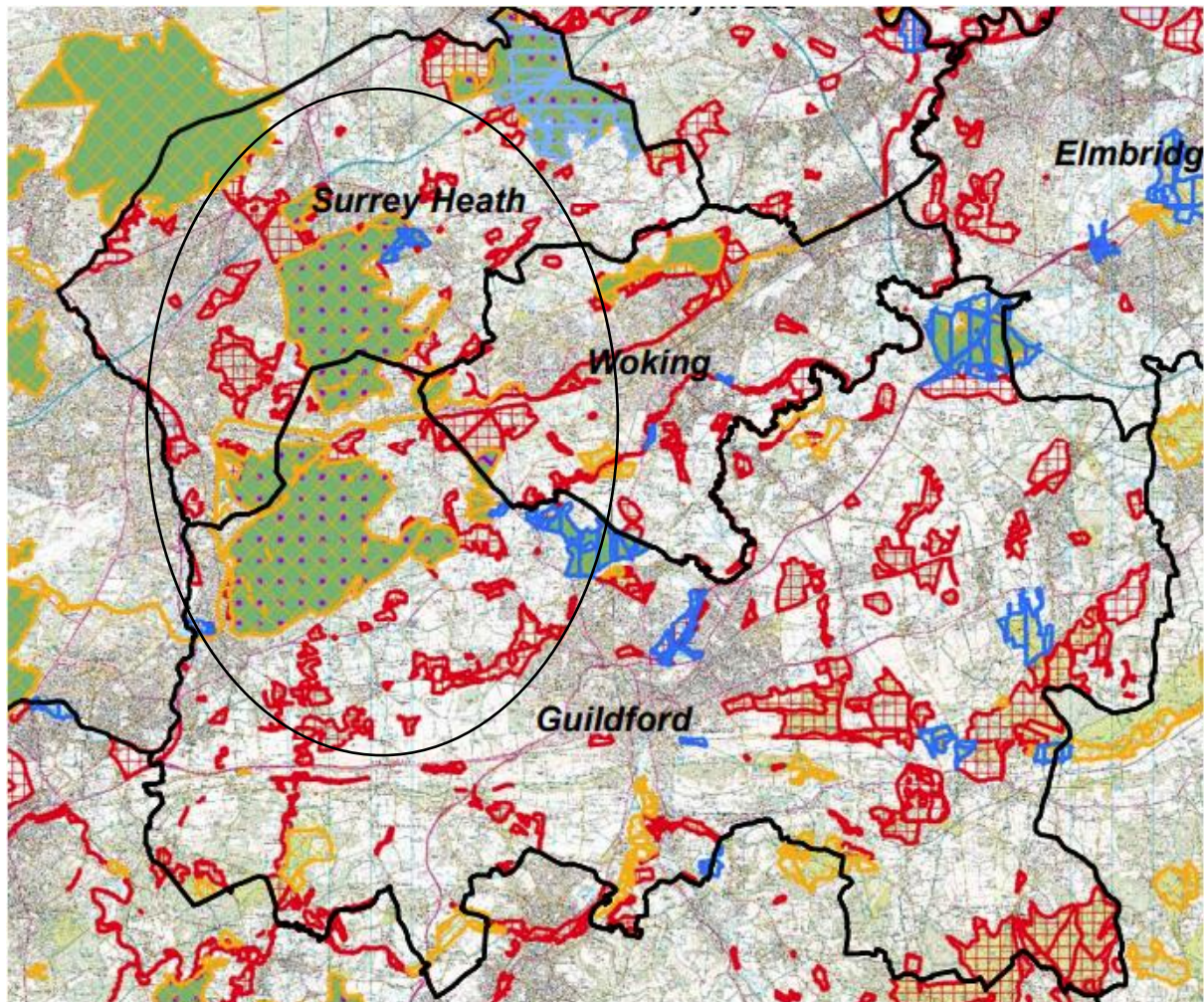
**Current Extent of AONB:**





There are extensive tracts of heathland of acknowledged importance to the northwest of Guildford. These merit protection within a landscape context

**Nature Conservation Designations:**

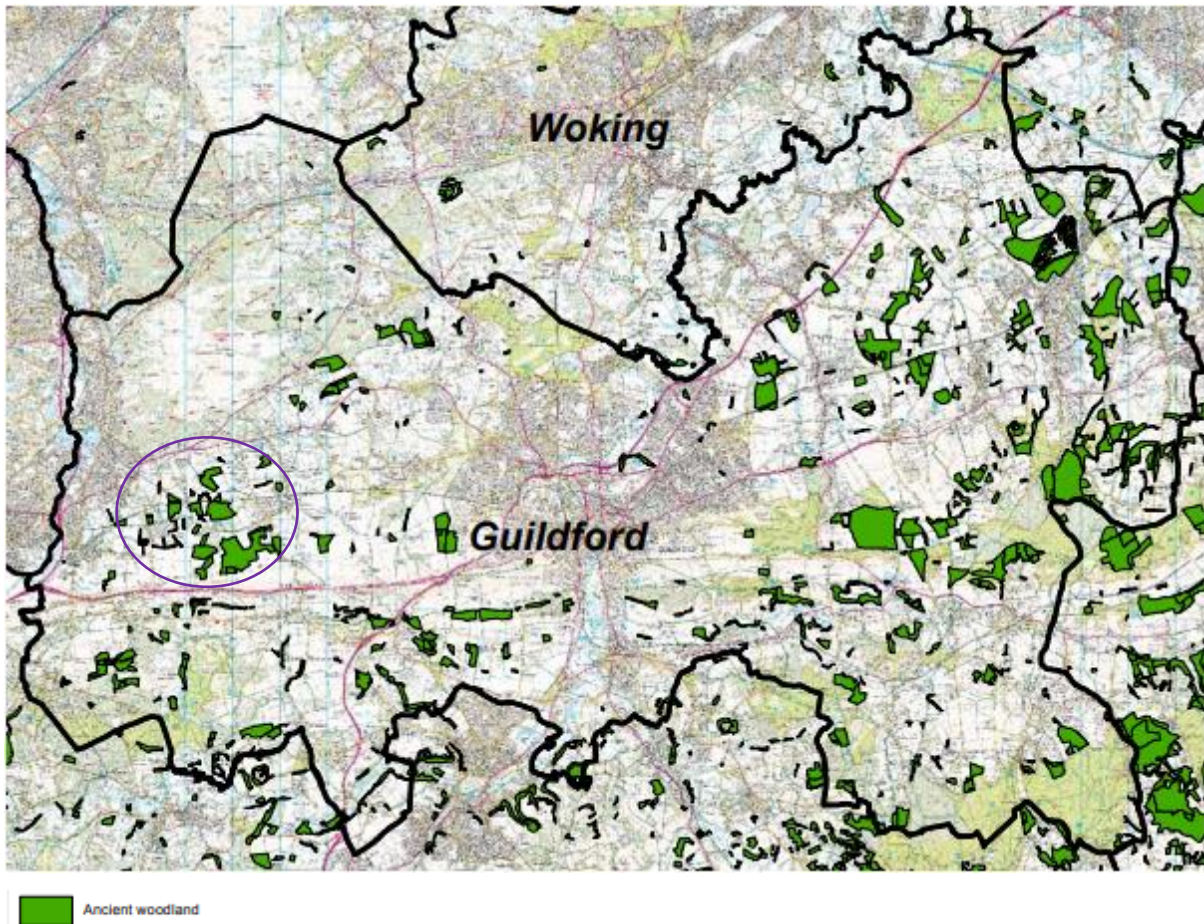


-  Local Nature Reserve
-  National Nature Reserve
-  Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
-  Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI)
-  Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
-  Ramsar sites
-  Special Protection Area (SPA)



There is considerable ancient woodland in the area north of the Hog's Back.

**Ancient Woodland:**



We invite NE to give considerable thought to how to convey the significance of Blackwell Farm for scenic beauty, especially if it is concluded that the area meets the criteria for designation but is excluded due to the Local Plan allocation. It will be crucial to ensure any development on this land is of a form that recognises the national status of the landscape in which it will be set. It should also be noted that the infrastructure, on which development of Blackwell Farm is contingent, is no longer part of the highway programme.

## **2) South of Guildford: Evaluation Areas EA3 and EA4**

We welcome the proposed inclusion of land to the south of Guildford. The current AONB boundary fails to acknowledge the value of the Wey, its tributaries and floodplain, and of the Greensand Hills south of Guildford. These valley floor and rolling hill areas include extensive areas of high natural beauty and, also, form an integral part of the downland landscape.





Any revised boundary should include Chinthurst Hill within the AONB which readily meets the full range of criteria. It provides landscape, wildlife and cultural interest. The green lane footpath approach and dense vegetation provide a sense of wildness. The more open, rabbit grazed areas allow views giving a sense of the vastness of the landscape.

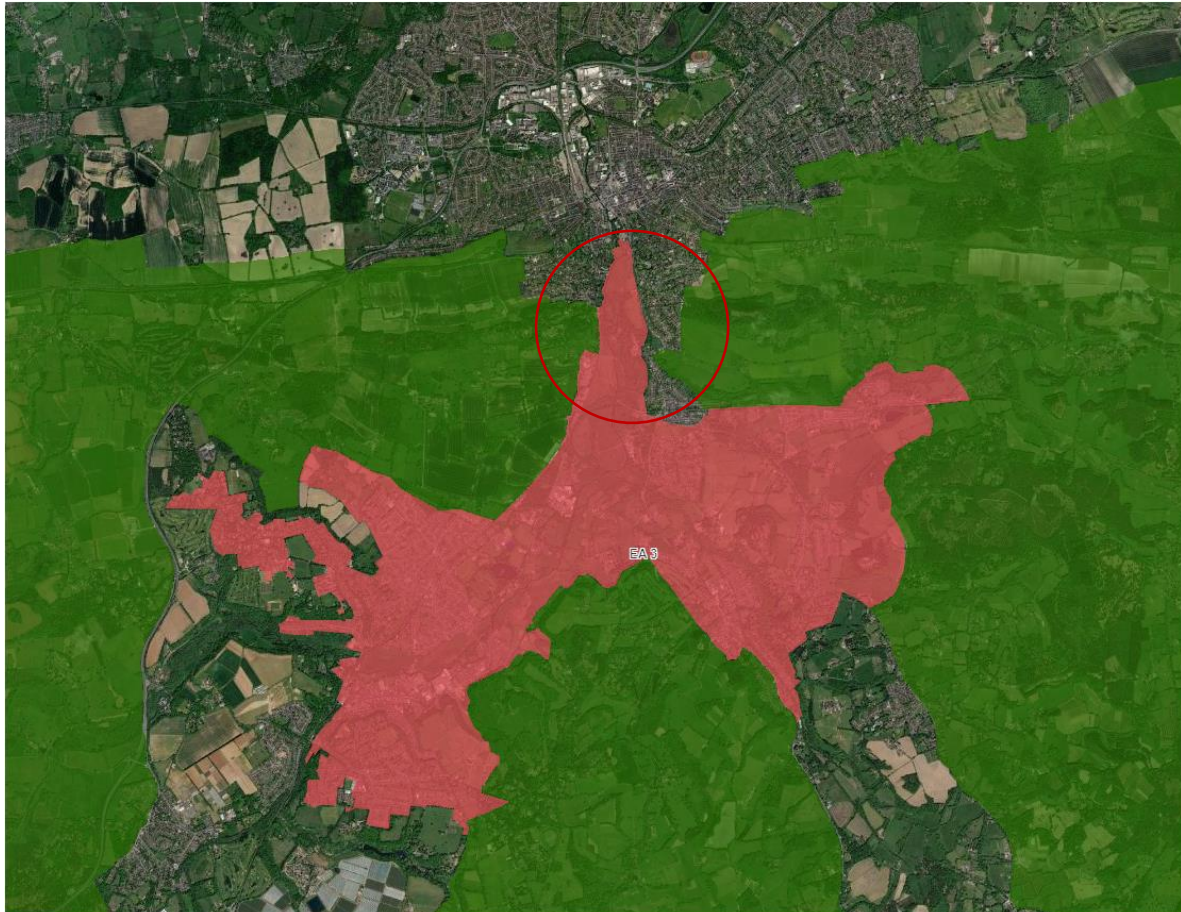
**View from Chinthurst Hill across EA3 to Downs**







Any revised boundary should incorporate the land identified above which includes the area of the Tillingbourne managed as the Chilworth Gunpowder Mills. This is an area of high scenic value. The series of enclosed and intimate scenes that you discover as you progress along the riverside paths enhances the sounds of the Tillingbourne and of birds and insects. There is a rich mix of cultural heritage and natural beauty, such as millstones interspersed by pendulous sedges or views across old mill ruins to ponds and countryside beyond. The farmland adjoining the woodland contributes to the landscape quality and mix of shade and light.





Please note we attach particular importance to the area indicated by the red circle and include our comments on this in a separate section on “green fingers”.

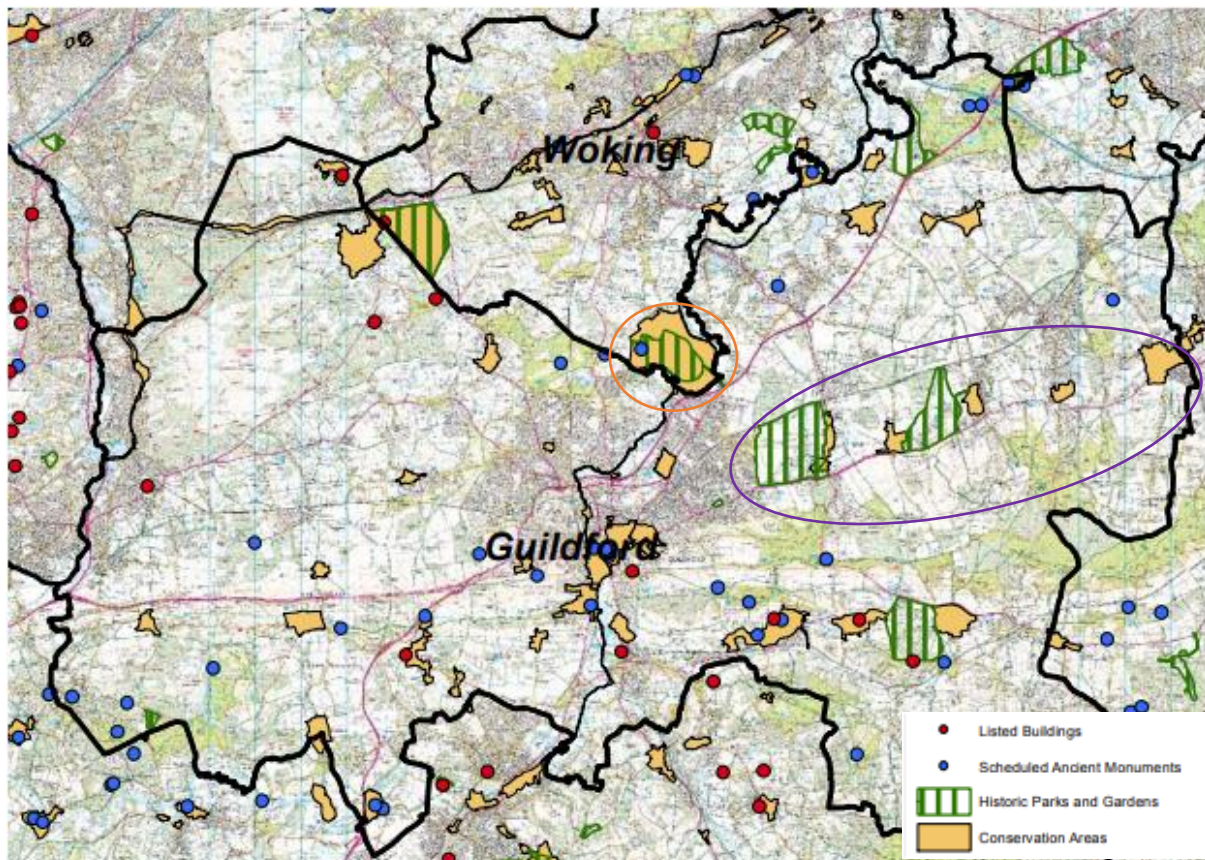
### 3) East of Guildford

We welcome the inclusion of land to the east of Guildford in the vicinity of Hatchlands and East Clandon but consider the area of proposed extension is insufficient. It fails to embrace sufficient river floodplain and wooded low weald landscape with notable estates of historical interest in the area. These extend further north in this area. We consider that such landscape was insufficiently valued at the time of the original designation.

We suggest that area of search EA6 did not extend far enough to capture the landscape areas of great natural beauty to the East and North East of Guildford. It excludes various historical parks and gardens, ancient woodland and Sites of Nature Conservation Importance.

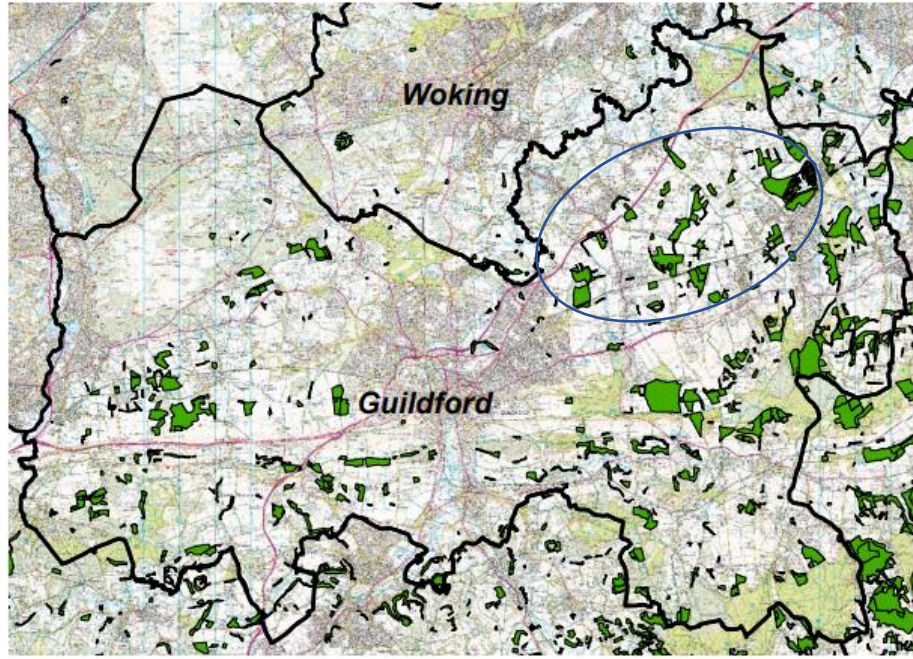
We are conscious that Gosden Hill allocated site lies to the east of Guildford. The interface between AONB and this site should be given careful consideration. It is important to ensure the ancient woodland in the vicinity that contributes so greatly to the landscape, as well as to biodiversity, is recognised and protected. We understand Gosden Hill will be excluded from the area of search due to its Local Plan allocation. This should not prevent inclusion in the AONB of high value lowland landscape beyond to the north east of Guildford.

#### Historic Features:

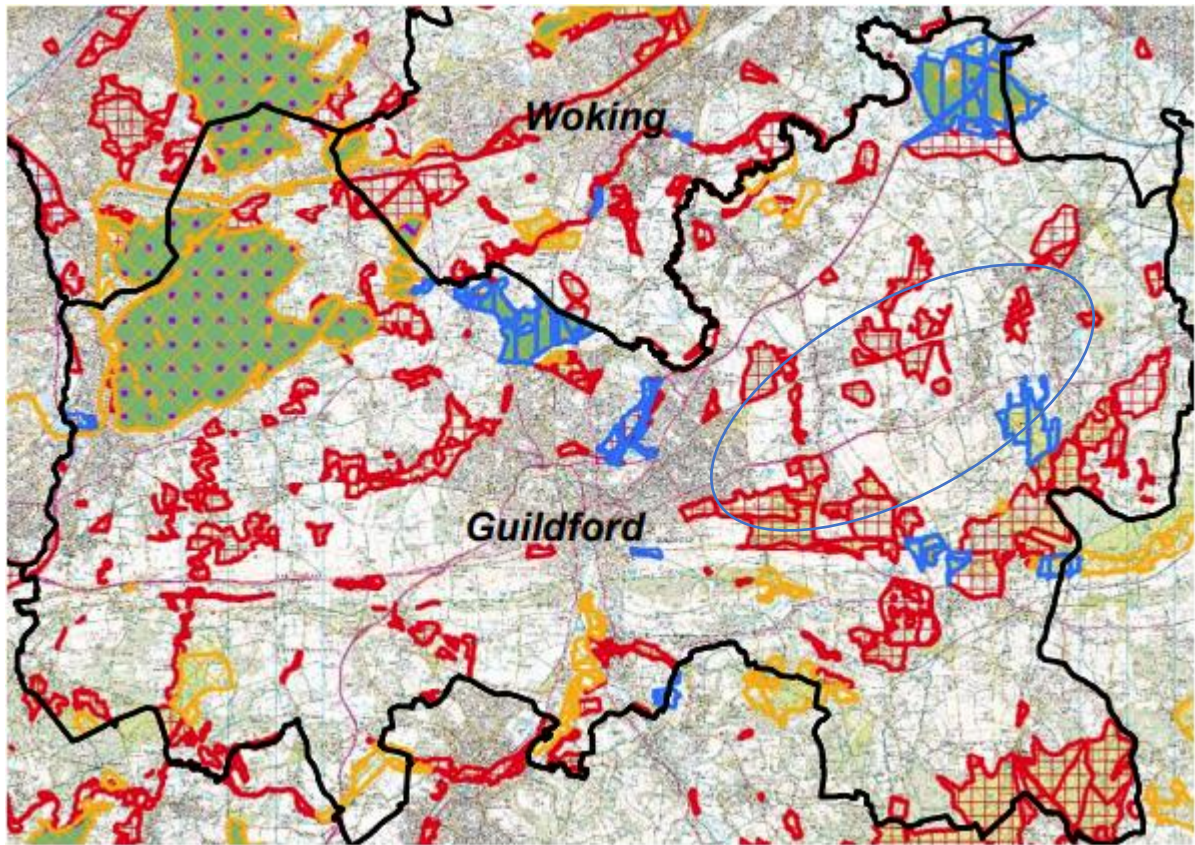





**Ancient Woodland:**



**Nature Conservation Designations:**



 Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI)





#### **4) Existing Boundary Anomalies – Omissions Around Guildford**

##### **The Mount**

We agree that the land to the right as you ascend The Mount, rising steeply from Guildford, should mark the beginning of the AONB. There may have been some uncertainty about its management or future development at the time of designation. Its management since has been entirely consistent with AONB status. It is a key part of the downland landform and affords spectacular views towards both town and country. The grassland is much more species rich than some of the nearby agricultural land within the AONB. It is recognised as an amenity space, has no allocation for development and is most unlikely to be developed in future. As the photograph below shows, it forms part of an iconic view from Guildford High Street, providing a visual connection between Guildford and the rural downland landscape in which it is set. It is a natural, and for many beckoning, gateway to the AONB.



**The Mount:**

**One of the finest, most appreciated and celebrated parts of the Surrey Hills landscape**





### **Land to North of Pewley Down:**

Another anomaly we draw to your attention is Warren Farm off Warren Road. Caution may have been exercised in not drawing this boundary too closely at the time of designation. Since then, the land in question has grown in importance as an entry to the AONB and to the ridge of Pewley Down. Warren Farm retains a rural character. The fields rising to Pewley Down have been bought by the public to be managed in ways that will enhance their nature conservation and amenity value in perpetuity. The field to the east of this proposed area, between Warren Road and One Tree Hill Road, has also been bought since designation with a view to protecting its rural character. Barn owls can be seen hunting in the daytime on the sloping fields that are currently excluded from the AONB. There are cowslips in the spring. The fields are appreciated by users of the public footpaths (shown in purple) and signify entering the downland landscape rising to Pewley Down from the north.



**Proposed extension North of Pewley Down**



## 5) Green Fingers:

Currently, a valued feature the AONB is that the downland landscape can be appreciated in views from within settlements such as Guildford. The town is nestled in the AONB. Views in and out are prized.

Recognition in this review of the landscape value of floodplain water meadow and rolling wooded countryside at the foot of the chalk and greensand ridges, opens up an exciting landscape possibility. The natural beauty of the Wey corridor to the south and to the north east of Guildford is of such quality, that a feature of a revised boundary can be green, river valley fingers at the interface between town and AONB. This can connect people and the natural beauty of our finest landscapes in a really powerful way, complementing the juxtaposition of town and down.

We offer evidence relating to the Wey Corridor to the south of Guildford, from search area SE3, and also to the north east of Guildford which we submit should connect with AONB countryside to the north west or to the north east of Guildford. We propose indicative areas for inclusion and images rather than boundaries. The natural beauty of the Wey corridor has benefitted from enlightened management by the National Trust, GBC and the Environment Agency.

### Wey Floodplain to South of Guilford:





The mosaic of wetland scrapes, carr woodlands, sand outcrops and rough pasture with variously gorse or bog species provides for a rich landscape that is all too rare today. Historical war time defences, canal structures and rare breeds contribute to the cultural heritage of the landscape. An otter has been observed in the Wey and climbing sloping pollarded willows in the area south of the rowing club.



**Cattle grazing on rough lowland pasture to west of the Wey (S of Guildford facing North)**



**View north along the Wey (S of Guildford, navigation joins river S of St Catherine's Lock)**





**View south along the Wey (south of Guildford)**





**View facing east across the Wey (south of Guildford)**

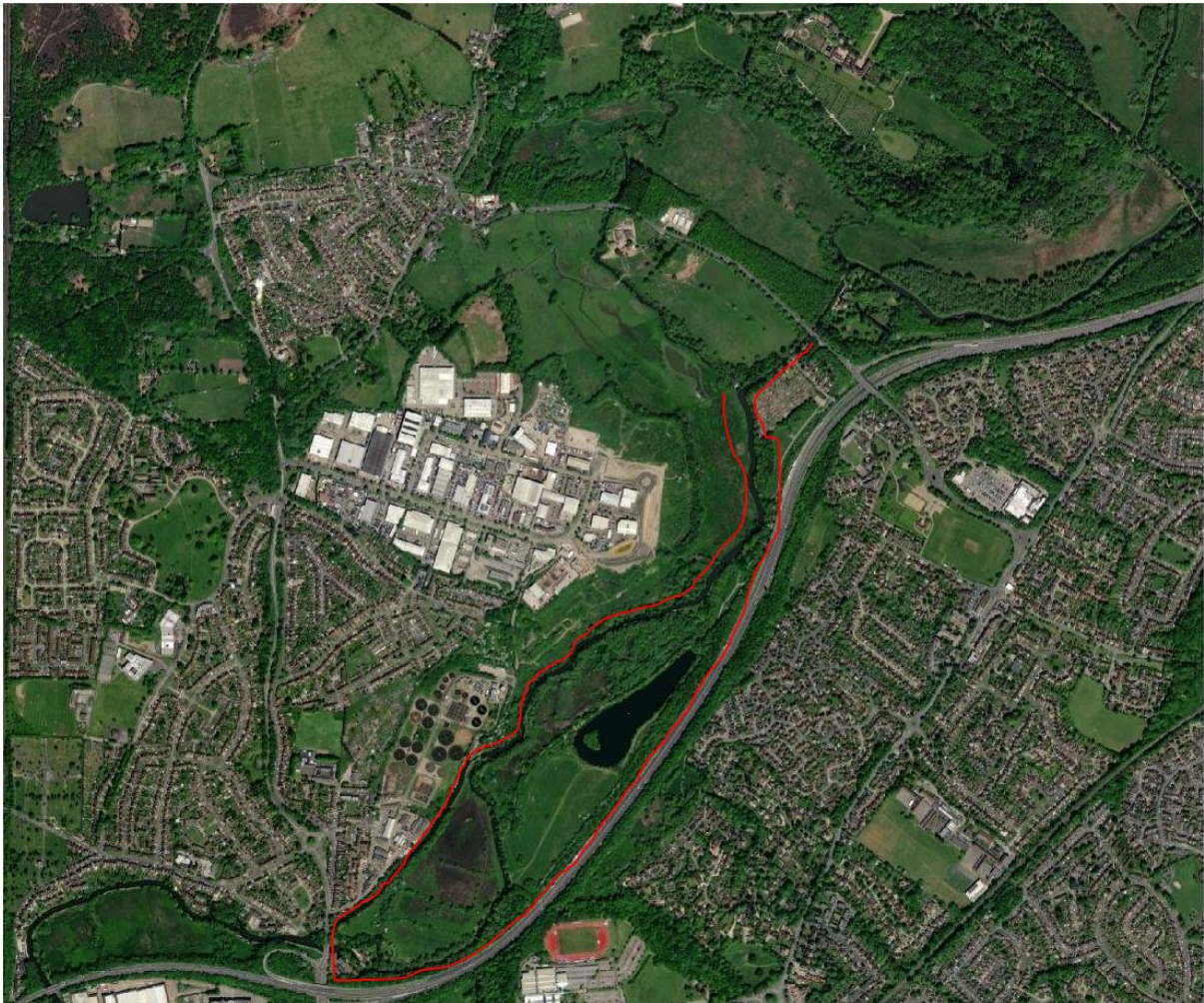




**View to west of Wey (South of Guildford): Kingcups in alder carr woodland**



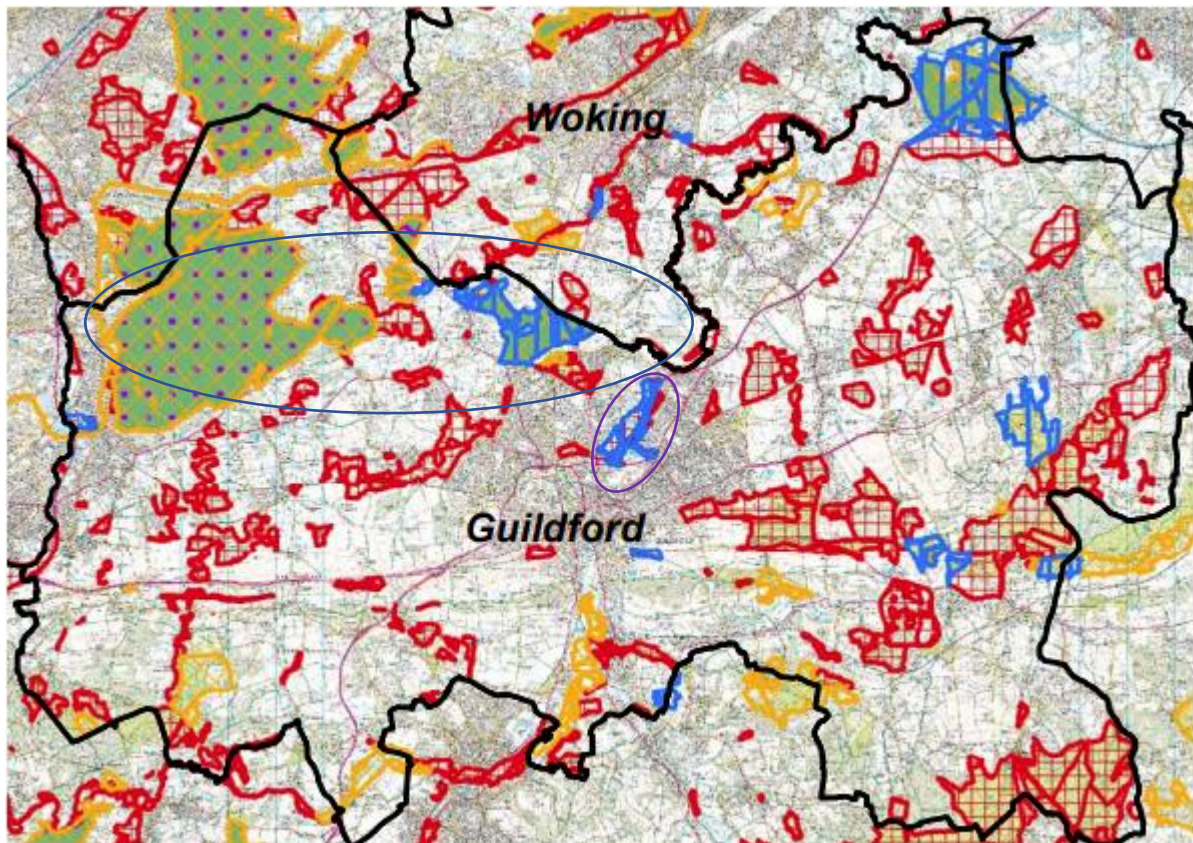
## Wey Floodplain to North East of Guildford:



The map below captures the nature conservation significance of the Wey floodplain and Riverside Park to the north east of Guildford. This review provides an opportunity to recognise the natural beauty associated with this riverside landscape. This area connects to Burpham Court Farm, to the famous country estate of Sutton Place, and to areas of great natural beauty such as Britten's Pond, Whitmoor Common, Merrist Wood and the Ash Ranges. Burpham Court Farm is an all too rare traditional floodplain farm, retained through Council ownership, which is of high natural beauty associated with regular flooding. Its attractive, water meadow landscape will be further enhanced in future by being managed as SANG.



## Nature Conservation Designations:



-  Local Nature Reserve
-  National Nature Reserve
-  Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
-  Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI)
-  Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
-  Ramsar sites
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**View across Wey and meadows towards Cathedral, taken from south of lake in Riverside Park LNR (NE of Guildford)**



**Bur-marigold in wetland habitat  
Wetland area of Riverside Park LNR**



**Flag irises amid reedmace in wetland**





**Herb, grass, rush and sedge-rich habitat SE of lake, Riverside Park LNR (NE of Guildford)**



Orchids along SE margin of lake, Riverside Park LNR (east of Wey, NE of Guildford)







**Pathside vegetation with speedwell to NE of lake, Riverside LNR (NE of Guildford)**



Herb and grass rich meadow to east of lake, Riverside LNR (NE of Guildford)







**View across lake in Riverside Park LNR from SE bank looking NW (NE of Guildford)**



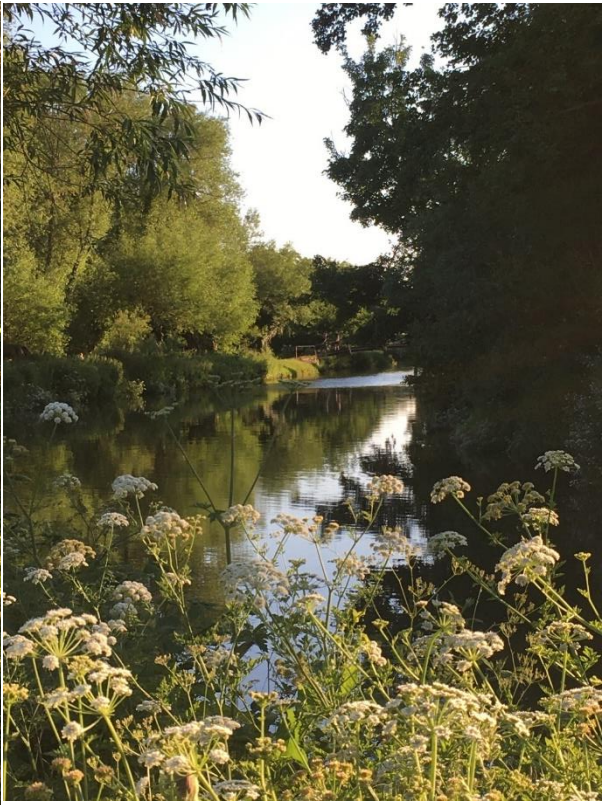
**View across lake in Riverside Park LNR from NW bank looking south west (NE of Guildford)**



Winter Scenes – Lake in Riverside Park







Scenes along the Wey (NE of Guildford)



Facing North along the Wey (NE of Guildford)







**Pollarded Willows north of Stoke Lock (Facing South)**



**View Across Stoke Water Meadow**



## **6) Enhance**

We trust it will appear to Natural England that the areas we have identified are of such outstanding natural beauty that designation as AONB is desirable. We consider the areas proposed to be rich in the full range of attributes that contribute to natural beauty, and that they will benefit from the purpose to enhance their natural beauty. These areas would form logical extensions to the existing boundary. AONB status would recognise the landscape beauty of highly valued floodplain water meadow, lowland heath and rolling wooded countryside that has often been overlooked in landscape designations. Landscape scale management, protection and appreciation of these areas will be ever more important with fragmentation of habitat, climate change and the need for nature recovery.



