

Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Boundary Variation Project

Public Consultation

Response from Westcott Village Association to

SurreyHillsAONBboundaryreview@naturalengland.org.uk

June 2023

Westcott Village Association (WVA) is the Residents Association for Westcott which often provides comment in relation to all planning matters which are relevant to Westcott Parish and beyond.

We have reviewed DEFRA's consultation web page, Natural England's factsheet summary and Consultation Document.

This response relates to "Land Northwest of Dorking" for which minor boundary refinements are proposed at Clay Copse, Milton Court Farm and Milton Heath.

WVA is disappointed that this wider area was not included as a candidate area. Further investigation has revealed that the Hankinson Duckett Associates (HDA's) AONB Study had recommended the inclusion of a wider area of land as a Candidate Area. In our view this was more than justified.

HDA's assessment of this area was as follows (with WVA's additional comments in red):-

--STARTS--

RECOMMENDED ADDITIONAL AREA 14-1

Small area of Greensand Valley to the west of Dorking.

Landscape Type: I - Greensand Valley

Character Area: I1 - Tillingbourne and Pipp Brook Greensand Valley

NATURAL BEAUTY CRITERIA

Landscape Quality

Area of sloping farmland at the foot of the chalk ridge, includes some intact hedgerows and is visually contiguous with the valley landscape to the west.

WVA comment that the rolling farmland with the meandering Pipp Brook in the valley floor are indistinguishable from the AONB landscape to the west, north of Westcott. Public views from the adjacent higher ground of Ranmore are enhanced by the existence of these fields in the mid distance providing an attractive setting to Dorking. The prominent sloping field to the south is all part of the same landscape. The landscape makes a positive contribution to instilling the country town character of Dorking. Extensive hedgerow planting has taken place recently.

www.sondesplacefarm.com/conservation-work.html

Once established those hedgerows will enhance the landscape quality and biodiversity so that there would no longer be such large fields.

Scenic Quality

South facing landform at the foot of the chalk ridge, falling to the Pipp Brook, which gives a recognisable sense of place. The landform contrasts with striking views of the chalk ridge scarp to the north, providing a strong sense of scale.

WVA comment that whilst the presence of the built area of Dorking is apparent, it does not impose itself on the character of this landscape. The substantial tree and shrubbery belt screening the Curtis Road Industrial Estate is required to be maintained under a Section 106 Planning Agreement with the Council. The openness and relationship of the fields with the adjoining AONB landscape creates a sense of spaciousness.

Relative Wildness

Unsettled with no internal roads or public rights of way, but sense of remoteness reduced by glimpses of development to the south and east.

WVA comment that Little human interference to the farming landscape reinforces a sense of relative wildness despite the proximity of the built-up area.

Relative Tranquillity

Presence of stream and natural sounds, but tranquillity reduced by passing trains on the North Downs railway line to the north, but no different to the AONB stretching west to Shalford and Guildford, and glimpses of development to the south and east,

Natural Heritage Features

Scarp foot slopes with limited tree cover.

Cultural Heritage

Setting to ridge scarp to the north and Milton Court and the Pipp Brook to the south.

SPECIFIC ISSUES ADDRESSED WHEN IDENTIFYING EXTENT OF AREA 14-1

Pocket of land contiguous with the landscape to the west, defined by existing AONB boundary to the north and west. Pipp Brook to the south, and the settlement edge to the east.

EVALUATION

There is a strong weight of evidence to support including this area within the proposed extension to the Surrey Hills AONB. The landscape quality and scenic quality are outstanding and are a continuation of the same adjoining AONB landscape to the west and north. It is all the more valuable in landscape terms from being so close to Dorking which does not detract from its setting. The development at Milton Court and Sondes Place, even though set within their own landscape grounds, are not considered to be part of the same open landscape identified. The Draft Local Plan housing site allocation (Policy DS26) has been excluded and also because it is enclosed on 3 sides by development.

--- ENDS ---

WVA comments on “Factors related to Natural Beauty”

Please see our comments in red above which amplify HDA’s assessment in their AONB Study together with our photographs contained within this representation.

WVA comments on “Is it Desirable to Designate”

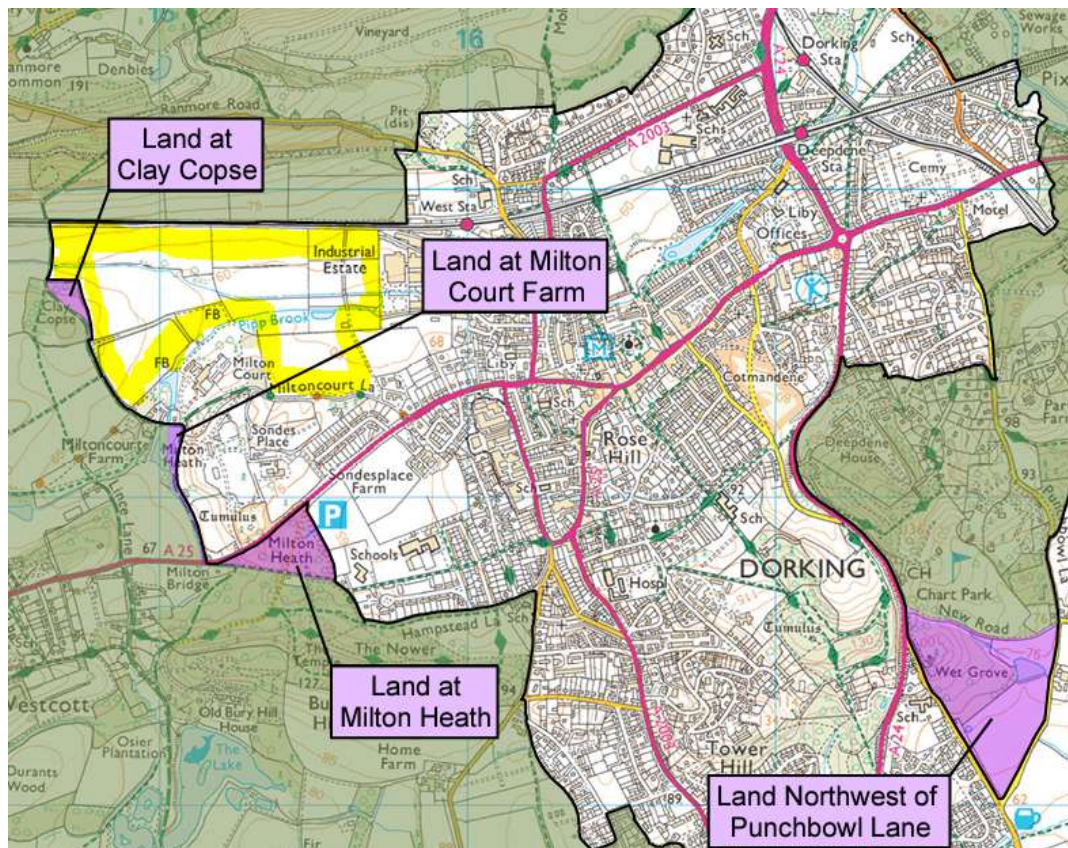
Please see our comments in red above and note HDA’s comment “Pocket of land contiguous with the landscape to the west, defined by existing AONB boundary to the north and west. Pipp Brook to the south, and the settlement edge to the east”.

It is also worth noting that all of the land we identify for a potential boundary change is almost entirely in the ownership of a single landowner with further significant ownerships to the east, west and south of this. This landowner continues to undertake significant stewardship and conservation initiatives. www.sondesplacefarm.com/conservation-work.html

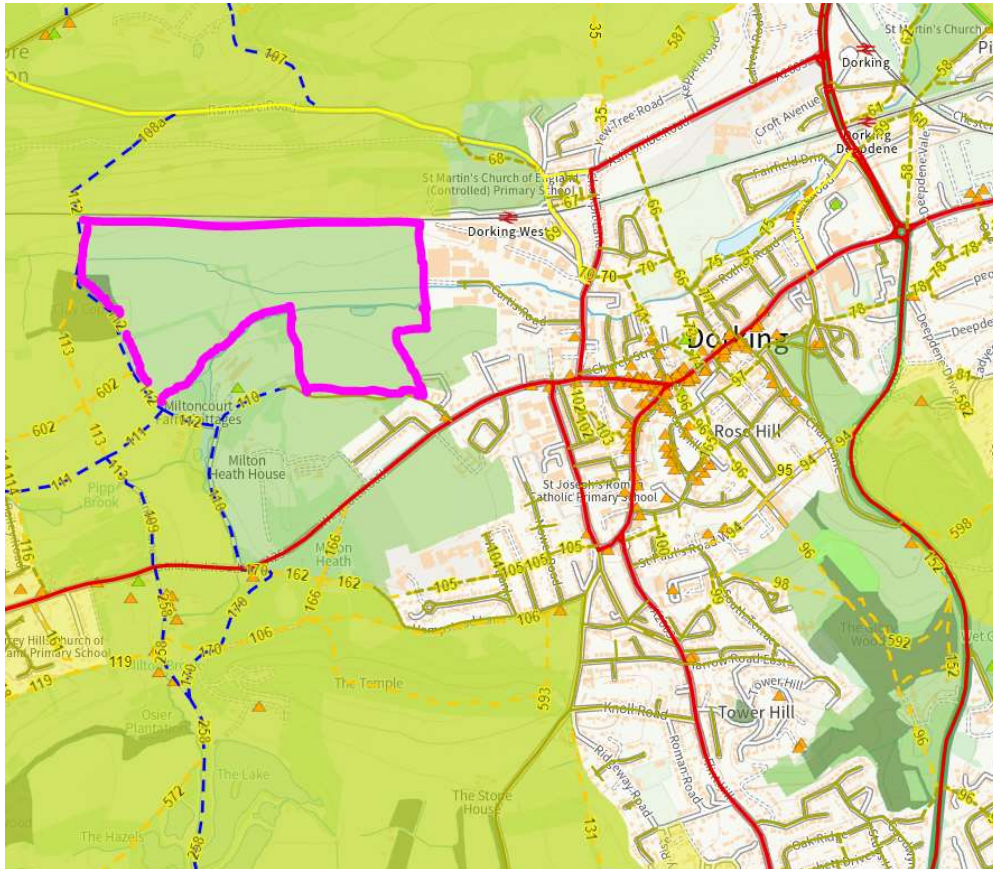
Given the fact that the current AONB boundary was last drawn in 1958 WVA believes it is entirely appropriate to look at this area again and holistically.

WVA comments on “Identifying a suitable boundary”

In light of HDA’s assessment and our own analysis, WVA would like to propose an alternative easily distinguishable boundary which address the eight boundary setting criteria and we have highlighted this on Boundary Map Fig 25 from the Consultation Document below. It is also worth noting that our proposal omits the proposed housing site to the west of Dorking in the draft Mole Valley Local Plan (DS26 Land at Milton Court Lane).



The revised boundary would therefore extend the existing AONB up to Curtis Road Industrial Estate tree belt to the east and field boundaries/ the proposed DS26 designation to the south east. Milton Court Lane/ Cycle Route/ FP 110, the curtilage of the Grade II* Listed Milton Court and the Pipp Brook would provide a strong defined south boundary. For ease this is also shown edged purple on an extract from the Surrey Interactive Map below which identifies the existing AONB in light green and the Green Belt in darker green:-



Photographs and Images

I am pleased to share a selection of photographs which were all taken on Monday 29th May 2023.



Figure 1- elevated distant view east south east from Ranmore towards Dorking. Existing AONB in foreground, the proposed AONB, (including Clay Copse in mid view) and Dorking beyond



Figure 2- Hedge planting information board relating to extensive planting programme on the proposed AONB land. Note hedge planting in figures 3, 4 and 5 below.



Figure 3- view northeast over proposed AONB towards railway line from the intersection of the farm track and footpath 142 at the southeast corner of Clay Copse. Ranmore and Denbies Hill beyond



Figure 4 - view north northwest from farm track to east of Clay Copse over proposed AONB towards railway line and Ranmore beyond. Photograph taken from same position as Figure 3



Figure 5- view east towards Dorking from farm track to north of Milton Court and Pipp Brook. Note far tree line beyond the marquee which is now screening Curtis Road Industrial Estate



Figure 6- Pipp Brook looking west over proposed AONB land towards Milton Court upstream



Figure 7- elevated view from Ranmore looking southeast over existing AONB in foreground and proposed AONB to the south of railway line (including Clay Copse on the right of the image, Milton Court in the centre) and Dorking beyond (top left)

James Leaver

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