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Jonathan Lord MP
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24 November 2020

Dear Jonathan,

Thank you for your letter of 22 October to the Secretary of State with a number of co-signatories about the status of the boundary review of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). I am replying as the Minister responsible for protected landscapes policy and apologise for the delay in doing so. Defra is currently dealing with high volumes of correspondence due to COVID-19. Thank you for your understanding during this challenging time.

We remain committed to ensuring that landscapes such as the Surrey Hills AONB are recognised for their beauty, that they flourish as havens for nature and that they provide a valuable opportunity for visitors to experience inspiration, adventure and relaxation. The Government announced on 18 November a 'Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution' which includes assurances to start the process for the creation of new National Parks and AONBs in 2021.

As you may be aware, the statutory responsibility for appraising new or extended National Parks or AONB designations is held with the independent statutory authority, Natural England. I can confirm that Natural England will take forward the development of a programme of designation priorities in the coming year and this will include the consideration of the Surrey Hills extension.

I also understand that members of the Surrey Hills AONB and other local partners are in discussions with Natural England to review and streamline the designation process as recommended by Julian Glover in the Landscapes Review, published in September 2019. This support is invaluable as the suggested improvements to the designation process will inform the future programme of designations.

Thank you for making me aware of the breadth of support for this designation.

Yours sincerely,
John Gardiner