

Proposed Caterham Woods extension

Context

This boundary extension includes the steep folded wooded chalk slopes which lie between the chalk scarp at Gravelly Hill (within the existing AONB) and the settlement of Caterham. It also includes ancient woodland and historic defence sites on the edge of the chalk scarp south of Chaldon.



Carpets of wild garlic in Old Park Wood

Extent to which the natural beauty criterion is met

The area includes:

- Dramatic, steep and folded chalk slopes.
- Extensive areas of woodland including ancient woodland sites (e.g. Old Park Wood) and woodland which frames and defines the chalk scarp to the south.
- Arts and Crafts housing and historic sites which contribute to natural beauty.

Significance

This proposed extension is unique within the context of the chalk valleys to the north of the Surrey Hills AONB forming some of the steepest and most dramatic chalk slopes and extensive areas of woodland. Special qualities relate to the drama and scale of the topography, elevated and glimpsed views across wooded slopes, extensive areas of intact semi-natural habitat close to built-up areas and historic features which add interest and contribute to the natural beauty of the area. This is an inward-looking landscape but one which seamlessly connects to the existing AONB to the south.

Key Issues affecting the area's special qualities

The following issues are currently experienced in this area and are relevant to considering the difference AONB designation may make:

- Loss of chalk grassland sites due to establishment of secondary woodland and scrub.
- Lack of woodland management resulting in a loss of structural diversity and biodiversity.
- Potential loss of heritage including Whitehill Tower and the integrity of Arts and Crafts housing.
- Extension of garden curtilage and domestic clutter into woodland resulting in loss of semi natural character through gradual urbanisation.

The inclusion of the Caterham Woods provides an important connection between existing communities to the north and the chalk scarp to the south. This area is integral to the wider North Downs Way and

acts as a green corridor maintaining strong east-west continuity. The inclusion of this area helps to widen the AONB landscape at one of its narrowest points. Designation would support continuity in the active management of woodland enhancing biodiversity along with calcareous grassland restoration supporting Biodiversity Opportunity Area initiatives including connecting existing SSSI and SNCI sites e.g. Quarry Hangers, currently managed by Surrey Wildlife Trust.

Other relevant factors

The definition of a boundary to include the steep wooded slopes to the south of Caterham has been particularly challenging due to the nature of the wooded/urban interface and the risk of the boundary becoming overly convoluted. Where the landscape drops northwards towards the settlement of Caterham, care has been taken to include the steepest wooded or open slopes where the folded nature of the topography is strongly expressed and there are features of interest including ancient woodland, whilst avoiding the splitting of settlement. Tandridge Local Plan was consulted to determine the extent of urban areas and Caterham Conservation Area. The proposed boundary does not include any of these built-up areas. Nevertheless, the proposed boundary extension does include some areas of built development associated with the Arts and Crafts housing along Weald Way and Woodland Way (part of the War Coppice Garden Village). These areas have been included due to their low density and local distinctiveness with contributes to the area's natural beauty. It also includes the Mottrams/Caterham Preparatory School and loose development along Harestone Hill as this built form is set within established grounds and wooded hillsides and is subservient to the surrounding landscape.

In terms of the boundary at Chaldon the landscape was considered to be in transition, becoming influenced by the presence of the urban edge and pony paddocks south of the village. Whilst the pattern of development is relatively low density, the urbanising effects of built form, property boundaries combined with post and rail fencing, horse shelters and storage, has created a degree of visual clutter. On balance Natural England has concluded that this area does not meet the natural beauty criterion and the location of the existing AONB is judged to be correct (save for a number of boundary anomalies). Only minor changes were made to the boundary here.

The proposed boundary

The proposed boundary provides an appropriate join with the existing Surrey Hills AONB boundary and includes the qualifying higher quality wooded slopes above Caterham whilst excluding the lesser quality equestrian land uses on the south side of Chaldon.

The boundary follows lanes, tracks and the edge of properties and woodland. Given the heavily wooded and settled fringes of this area, not all sections of the boundary have been possible to verify in the field. Where access has not been possible aerial photographs and OS MasterMap have been used to assist with identifying a suitable boundary feature to follow. The use of property boundaries in many instances means that the boundary is complex in some locations. This is judged to be acceptable in order to bring in qualifying areas of extensive dramatic chalk topography and areas of ancient woodland.



Whitehill Tower - a non-designated heritage asset at Tower Farm

The boundary includes areas of ancient woodland and Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (including Foxburrow Fields and The Valley) on the margins of the area. It also enables the inclusion of Whitehill Tower, a local landmark and the whole of the large multivalent hillfort at War Coppice Camp (scheduled monument) to be included within the AONB in its entirety.