



Response to the Surrey Hills AONB Boundary Review

Wanborough Parish Council

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Contents

Introduction	3
Wanborough Situation.....	3
Wanborough, Current Designation.....	4
Wanborough and the Surrey Hills AONB Review.....	7
Areas recommended for designation	8
Area A: Wanborough Fields, To the west of the hamlet	9
Landscape Quality.....	11
Scenic Quality.....	11
Relative Tranquillity	11
Natural Heritage.....	11
Cultural Heritage.....	12
Area B: Wanborough Woods and Grubground Copse	13
Landscape Quality.....	13
Natural Heritage.....	13
Cultural Heritage.....	13
Area C: Wanborough hamlet and surrounding farmland	14
Landscape Quality.....	17
Scenic Quality.....	17
Relative Wildness	18
Relative Tranquillity	18
Natural Heritage.....	18
Cultural Heritage.....	18
Area D: East Flexford and eastwards to include Down Place and Blackwell Farm	20
Landscape Quality.....	20
Scenic Quality.....	20
Relative Wildness	21
Relative Tranquillity	21
Natural Heritage.....	21
Cultural Heritage.....	21
Summary	22
Document Approval	22
Contact Details.....	22

Introduction

This document is a response to the call for evidence by Natural England for the current boundary review of the Surrey Hills AONB.

Wanborough parish sits partially within the Surrey Hills AONB, the remainder being within search area EA2 of the AONB review and therefore a candidate for designation. Wanborough Parish Council believe that there is an excellent case for the inclusion of the whole of Wanborough parish (and some adjacent areas) in an enlarged AONB, with benefits to both Wanborough and the AONB.

This document aims to outline the case for designation, based on the categories developed by Natural England:

Landscape Quality: a measure of the current physical state or condition of the landscape and its features

Scenic Quality: the extent to which the landscape appeals to the senses (primarily, but not only, the visual senses)

Relative Wildness: the degree to which relatively wild character can be perceived in the landscape and makes a particular contribution to sense of place

Relative Tranquillity: the degree to which relative tranquillity can be perceived in the landscape

Natural Heritage: the influence of natural heritage on the perception of the natural beauty of the area. Natural heritage includes flora, fauna, geological and physiographical features

Cultural Heritage: the influence of cultural heritage on the perception of natural beauty of the area and the degree to which associations with particular traditions, people, artists, writers or events in history contribute to such perception

Wanborough Situation

Wanborough parish sits roughly four miles to the west of Guildford and consists primarily of arable farmland and woodland.

Having been, until last century, a single farming estate centred on the manor house, it has avoided all but minor development. It is sparsely populated, with the majority of residents living in and around the hamlet located roughly in the centre of the parish. To the north it shares a border with the village of Flexford, to the south along Puttenham Heath Road and around Puttenham golf course.

Wanborough has a wide range of geology and topology, being dominated by the chalk ridge of the Hog's Back, with sandy soils to the south, acidic grassland on the northern slopes and loam and London Clay soils on the lower slopes to the north (see below). This gives a great deal of variation in vegetation and wildlife over a relatively small area.

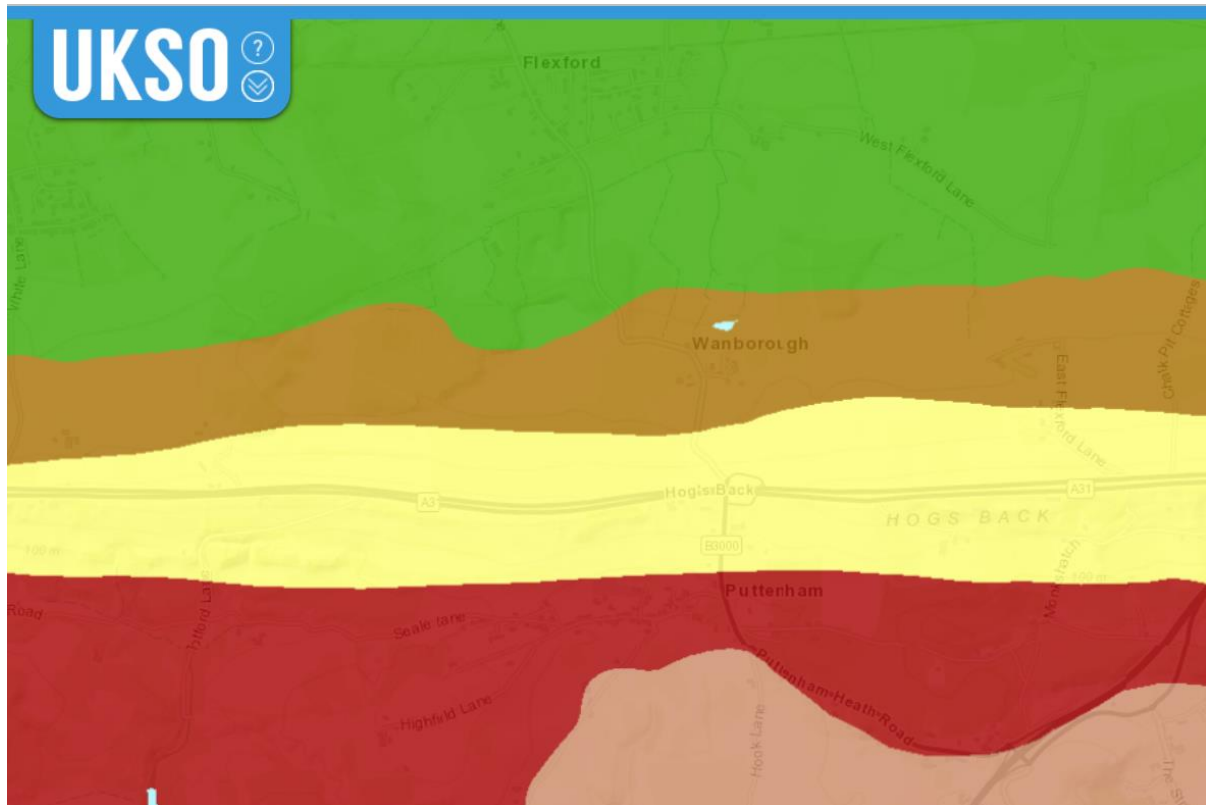


Figure 1: UK Soil Observatory Soilscape categories

Soilscape 18 (green): Slowly permeable seasonally wet slightly acid but base-rich loamy and clayey soils

Soilscape 7 (ochre): Freely draining slightly acid but base-rich soils

Soilscape 3 (yellow): Shallow lime-rich soils over chalk or limestone

Soilscape 10 (umber): Freely draining slightly acid sandy soils

Soilscape 6 (pink): Freely draining slightly acid loamy soils

Wanborough, Current Designation

Wanborough Parish sits wholly within the Green Belt. Currently the southern half of the parish is within the Surrey Hills AONB. The border of the AONB roughly bisects the parish east-west, cutting up south towards the Hog's Back towards the east of the parish to exclude East Flexford. The hamlet itself is partially within the AONB, bordered by the track which passes east-west through the hamlet, although the majority of the hamlet, including the 16th century manor house, sits outside the AONB, being to the north of the track.

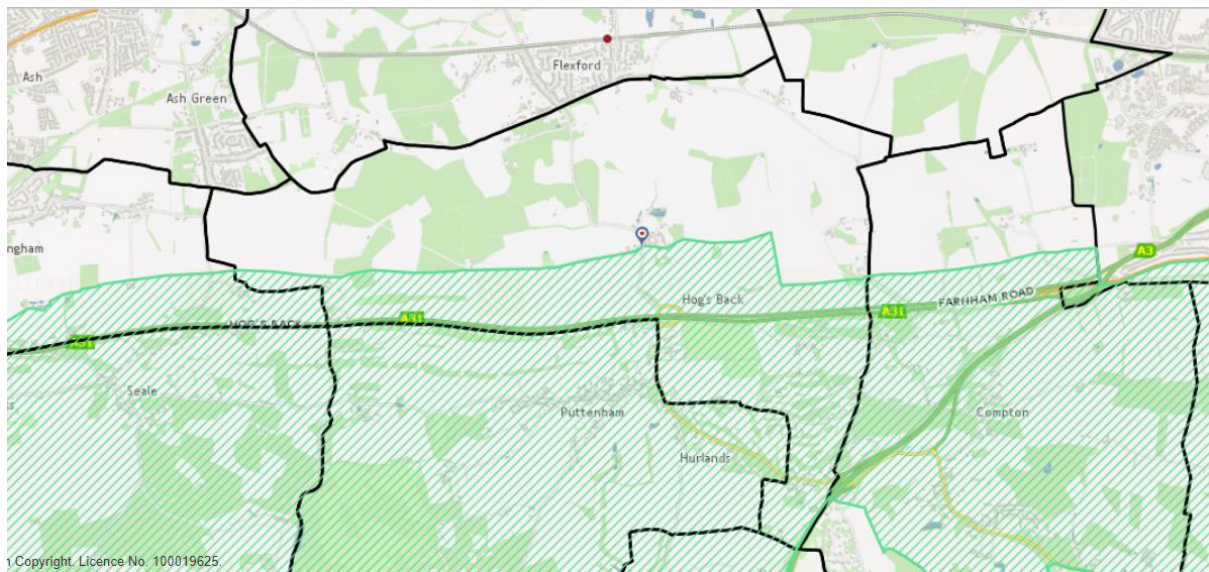


Figure 2: Wanborough parish (central), showing the AONB (light green shading)

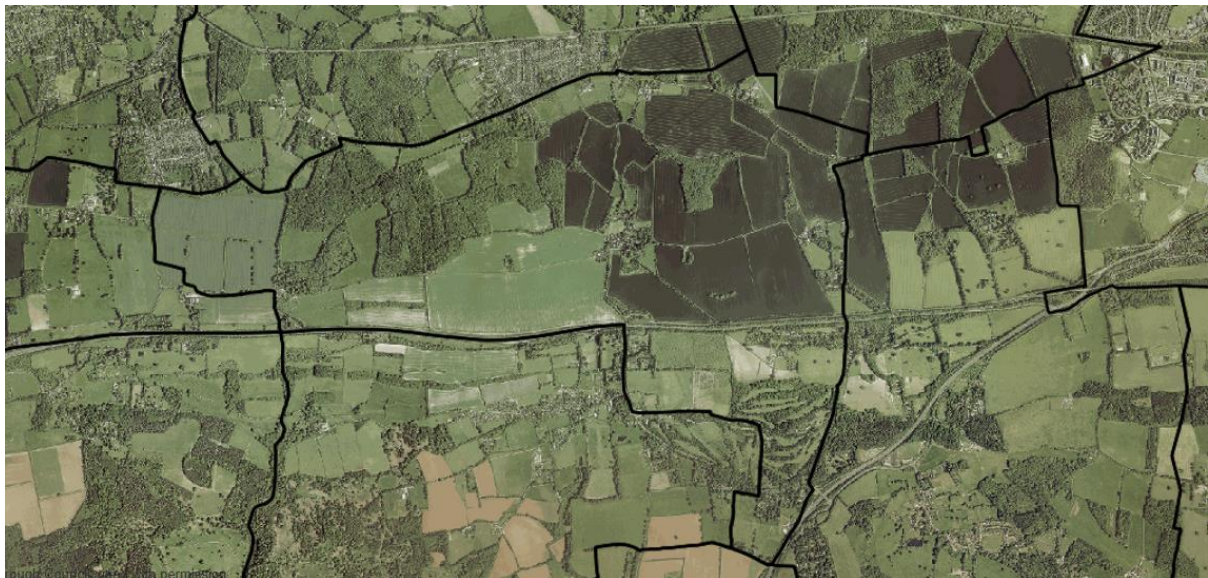


Figure 3: Wanborough parish, satellite view



Figure 4: Detail of AONB boundary to the west of the hamlet

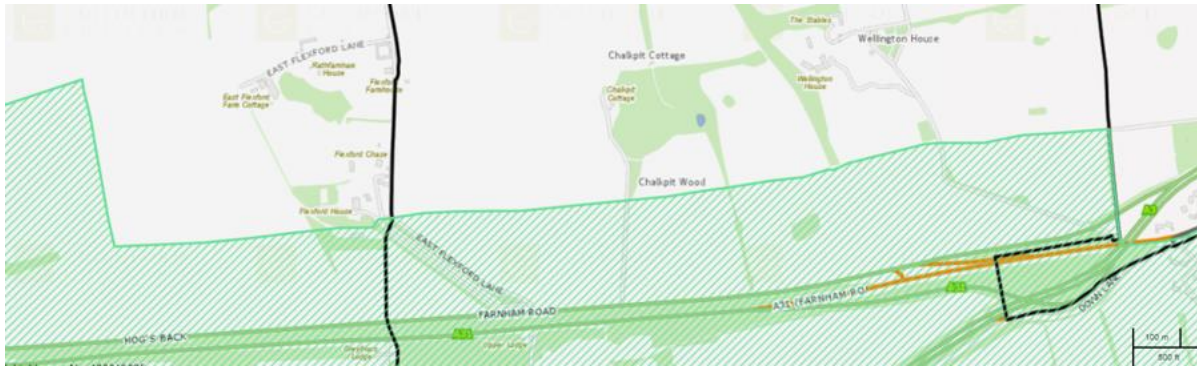


Figure 5: Detail of AONB boundary to the east of the hamlet

The majority of Wanborough parish is designated Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV). There are a number of areas of Ancient Woodland (purple with trees, below) and Sites of Nature Conservation Importance ('Wanborough and Normandy Woods SNCI', purple, below).

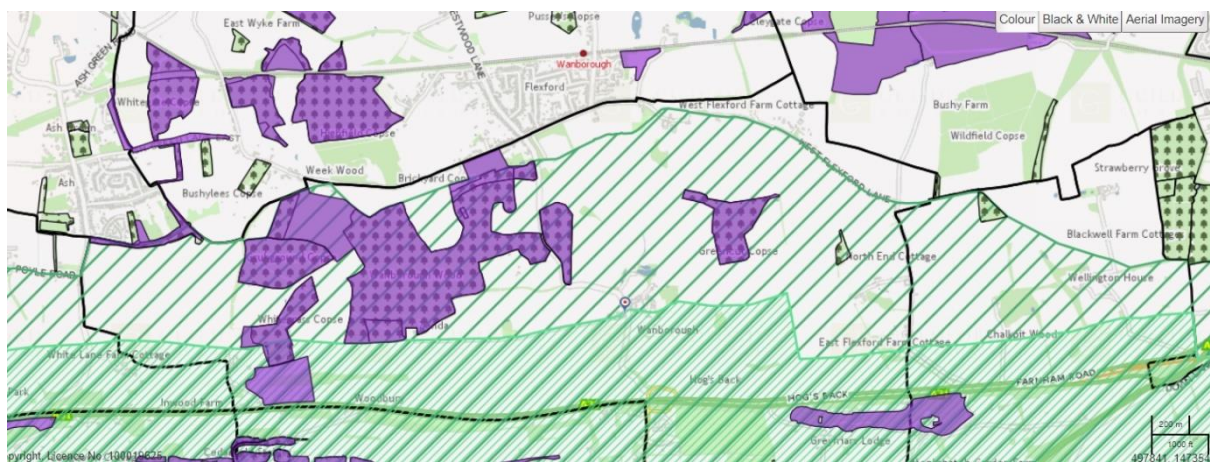


Figure 6: Northern area of Wanborough, showing AONB (light green), AGLV (dark green), Ancient Woodland (purple with trees), SNCI (purple)

Wanborough and the Surrey Hills AONB Review

The area of Wanborough parish not within the AONB is contained almost entirely within search area EA2 under consideration by the review.

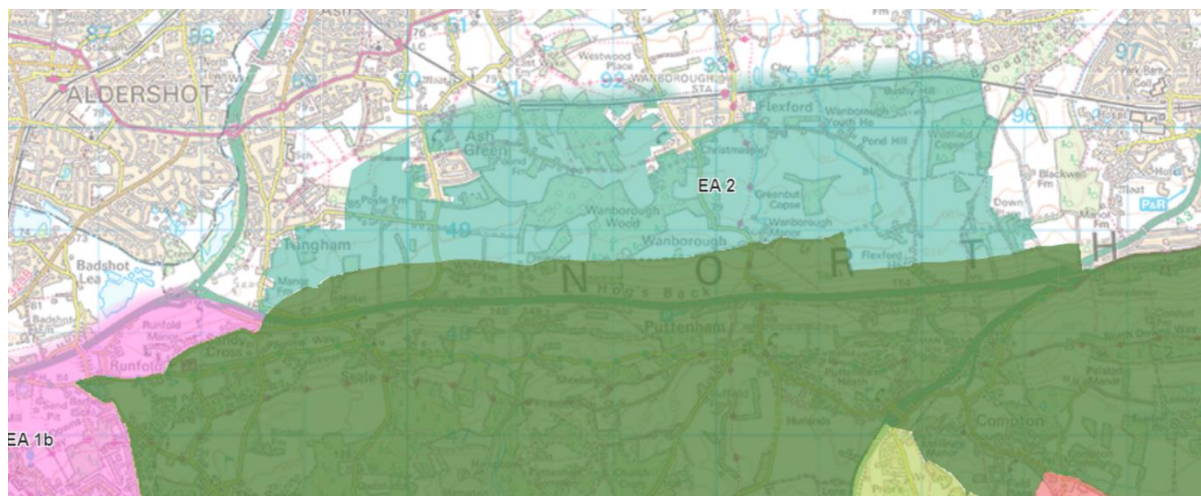


Figure 7: Area EA2 of the review

EA2 extends beyond the northern border of the parish which roughly follows Flexford Road and West Flexford Lane to the south of Flexford, and beyond the parish borders to east and west



Figure 8: Detail of area EA2 showing Wanborough

Areas recommended for designation

The areas recommended for designation can be roughly divided as follows:

Area A: Wanborough Fields, to the west of the hamlet

Area B: Wanborough Woods and Grubground Copse

Area C: Wanborough hamlet and surrounding farmland

Area D: East Flexford and eastwards to include Down Place and Blackwell Farm

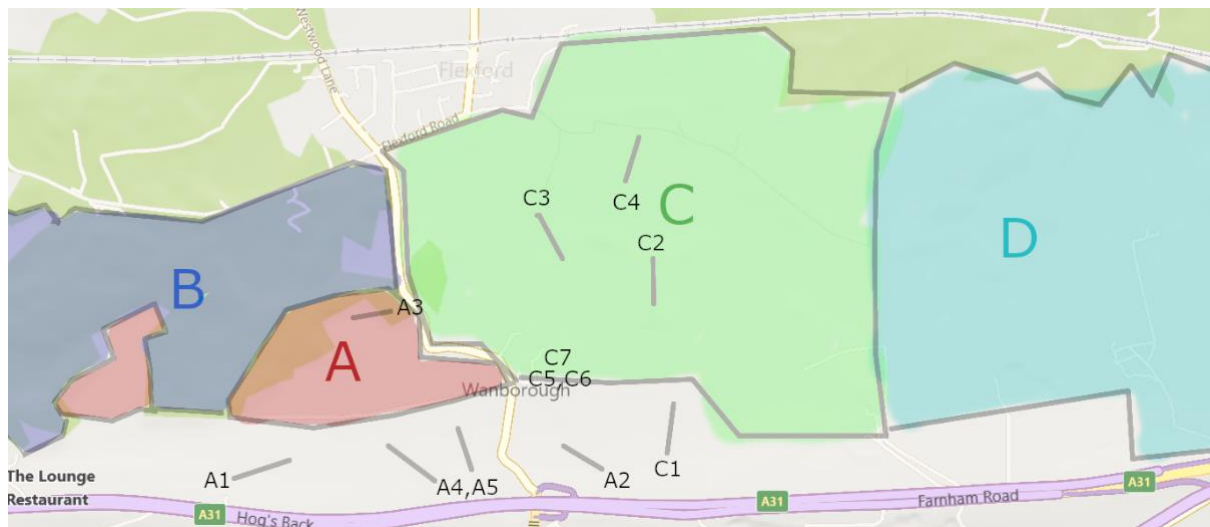


Figure 9: Map showing areas recommended by Wanborough Parish Council for AONB designation, including locations of photographs referenced below

Area A: Wanborough Fields, To the west of the hamlet

Wanborough consider the highest priority for AONB designation to be the area that has come to be known as Wanborough Fields, to the west of the hamlet



Photograph A1: Looking north-east from the Hog's Back over the AONB towards the AGLV (left, including the small wood/chalkpit) and Wanborough hamlet (centre-right)



Photograph A2: Looking from the Hog's Back westwards, towards the hamlet (centre-right), the AONB (left) and the AGLV (centre). Wanborough Woods (centre) and Grubground Copse (centre-left) can also be made out



Photograph A3: The smaller, northern field. Taken by drone in 2017 looking west



Photograph A4: Looking north-west across the AONB and AGLV from the Hog's Back



Photograph A5: Looking northwards across the AONB and AGLV from the Hog's Back

Landscape Quality

The fields to the west of Wanborough form a 250-acre expanse of grass chalkland, punctuated only by small woods and a chalk pit. These form a grand sweep down from the ridge of the Hog's Back until the gradient decreases and it hits the treeline.

As shown in photograph A1 this is a continuous field, broken only by a rough track. The southern portion adjacent to the Hog's Back is currently AONB whilst the northern section is not. With these two areas being contiguous and having no difference in quality the northern area should also be included.

Continuing north from the upper field and separated by the treeline where the soil changes from chalk to loam and clay is a smaller but still considerable field. Although this has seen unauthorised development in the last couple of years, it is a beautiful field and action is being taken by GBC to remove the illegal development and restore the field to its full glory (photograph A3, taken prior to development).

Scenic Quality

A rare example of a single continuous field of grass chalkland on this scale, Wanborough Fields provide a breath-taking panoramic vista from the Hog's Back to Wanborough Woods, over the farmland of Wanborough and Normandy, with London clearly visible in the distance. Being orientated east-west, some of the best views are from lower down in the field when the evening sun shines low across the field and, the deer are grazing and the skylarks are in song. Magical! Equally, on a stormy day the sky over the fields creates a strong sense of drama.

Relative Tranquillity

Although one is aware of traffic on the A31 and Westwood Lane, it is not visible or forefront. Wanborough Fields is a very peaceful and tranquil area.

Natural Heritage

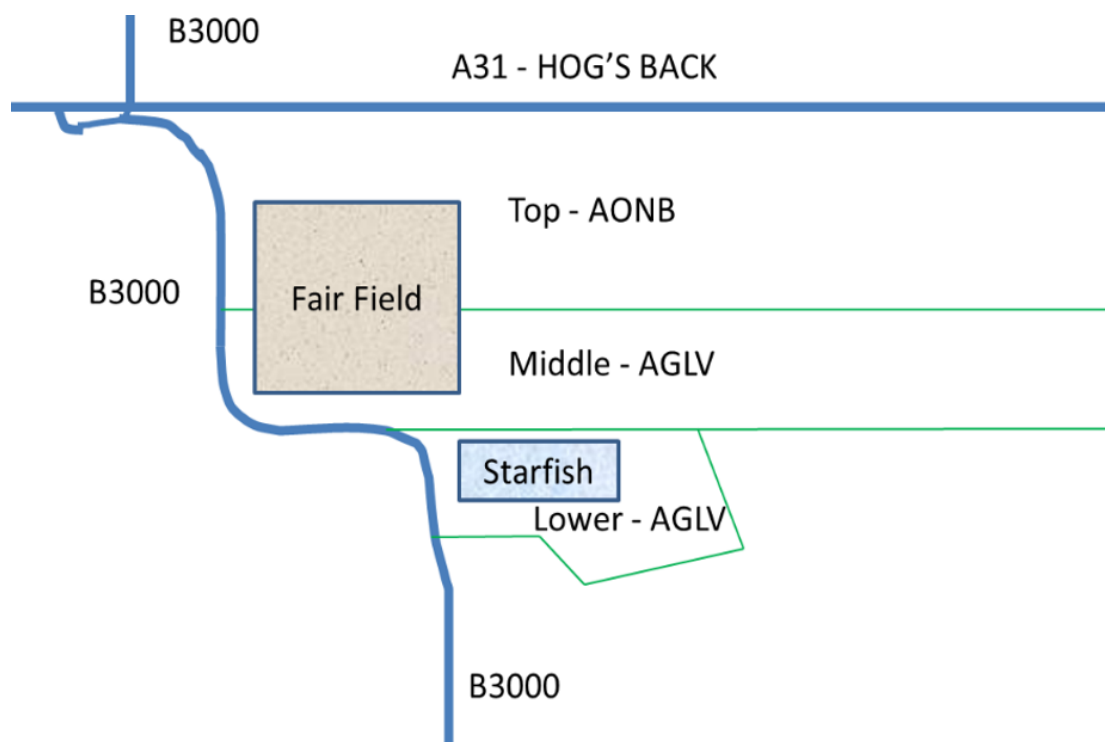
For centuries the upper fields have been farmed continuously for arable crops, dairy and sheep. The soil being low in nutrient due the geology has meant that the field has retained its openness over the centuries. Currently the majority is seeded for a hay crop whilst a proportion is left to wild and, more recently, tended as a variety of uses including smallholding allotments.

Wanborough Fields support a range of wildlife including:

- Deer, frequently seen grazing in numbers throughout the fields
- Skylarks, an RSPB red-listed bird with a glorious song, which nest in the fields
- Birds of prey, including kites, buzzards and kestrel
- Foxes, badgers

Cultural Heritage

The residents feel privileged to consider the area now known as 'Wanborough Fields' to be part of their heritage and feel a warm sense of attachment and protection towards it. In recent years the locals have put up a strong defence against the threat of development in the fields, showing the strength of local feeling towards the area.



The Fair Field: In 1511, Waverley Abbey obtained the right to hold an annual fair at Wanborough for 3 days each year from 23 August. By 1536 the fair was making £35 for the Abbey and had a Pie Poudre Court to sort out disputes and punish misdemeanours on the spot, especially trading offences.

A great number of flint implements have been found in the 'Fair Field' along with Roman Tiles and Pottery.

Operation Starfish: To deflect enemy bombing from the towns of Guildford and Aldershot, in 1942, as part of an overall Luftwaffe deception strategy, the Air Ministry ordered a decoy fire site to be constructed in the Wanborough field. The site has yet to be explored.

Area B: Wanborough Woods and Grubground Copse

See photographs A1, A2, A3 above.

Landscape Quality

To the north of the lower field there is a large stretch of woodland including Wanborough Wood and Grubground Copse. Designated ancient woodland and part of the Wanborough and Normandy Woods SNCI, this is one of the finest examples in Surrey of mixed woodland exhibiting base-enriched Ash, Field Maple, Hazel coppices with oak standards.

Quoting the Guildford Local Plan 2003 (Appendix 4), the SNCI lies *“over the Reading Beds and London Clay. The majority of woodland stands are composed of base-enriched Ash-Maple-Hazel coppices with Oak standards. Wanborough Wood displays are one of the best examples of this type of woodland in Surrey. More acidic Oak-Birch stands are also present, for example in Grubground Copse...In total, more than 300 vascular plant species have been recorded from the SNCI, including a large number of locally rare and scarce species and a county rarity, at its only known west Surrey location The SNCI is also important for mammals, birds, fungi, bryophytes and invertebrates.”*

Natural Heritage

See quote above from Local Plan 2003

Cultural Heritage

The area includes the site of a first century Roman-Celtic temple, discovered in the 1980's. The following quote is taken from Surrey Live:

“What makes the latest Wanborough find so exciting is that it is only the second known site where a stone-built, domed, round temple has been uncovered. It dates from the second half of the first century, the early stage of Roman occupation, and has features not dissimilar to pre-Roman round wooden temple-like structures. Like the temple on Hayling Island, which formed part of the same Celtic cultural area to which Surrey belonged, the first stone-built temple was constructed upon a site around a tree. No other sites like the ones at Wanborough and Hayling Island ever been found in Britain.”

<https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/local-news/how-celts-wanborough-took-religion-4859567>

Unfortunately, the site became known and was descended upon by unscrupulous detectorists. The temple was looted and the 'Wanborough Hoard' of first century coins was sold on the black market. A few specimens were later recovered. This tragic event led to the Treasure Act (1996).

<https://traffickingculture.org/encyclopedia/case-studies/wanborough/>

Area C: Wanborough hamlet and surrounding farmland



Photograph C1: Looking north from the Hog's Back over the farmland. AONB in the foreground, AGLV beyond the treeline



Photograph C2: Looking south over a corn field towards the Hog's Back on a misty morning



Photograph C3: Looking south-east in the fields to the north of Wanborough on a frosty morning



Photograph C4: Looking north-east across the fields to the north and east of Wanborough



Photograph C5: St Bartholomew's, Wanborough's 13th century parish church



Photograph C6: The Great Barn, Grade II listed*



Photograph C7: Wanborough Manor, Grade II listed

Landscape Quality

The majority of Wanborough hamlet lies outside the AONB. It is centred around the manor house, a small 13th Century church and the village hall. Being in the Wanborough Conservation Area it is well preserved and has a distinctly English character.

Surrounding the hamlet of Wanborough and north to Christmas Pie and West Flexford are a number of fields which have been farmed for arable or livestock since at least the Cistercians of the 12th Century. The land around the hamlet has been shaped by constant inhabitation and cultivation – there is good evidence that the hamlet was inhabited by the Anglo-Saxons, the Romano-Celts, and back to the neolithic era. Irregular in shape, the fields are punctuated by small areas of forest, notably Greencut Copse, or bordered by trees or mature mixed native hedgerows.

Scenic Quality

Although close to the A31 and metropolitan Guildford, being surrounded by farmland, Wanborough has a rural and agricultural feel to it. Particularly in the historic centre, it feels timeless and very English. The small amount of development that has taken place has been sympathetic and considerate of the situation and the nature of the hamlet.

The fields surrounding the hamlet form the lower slopes of the Hog's Back as the gradient becomes less severe, and are unbroken by houses other than the cluster of houses that comprise the hamlet of Wanborough. Some flat, but mostly undulating, they have been farmed sympathetically and provide a wide range of pleasing views unspoilt by major development.

If it wasn't for motorised traffic on the A31, Lady West's description of 1895 would still be accurate today:

If a horseman cantering on the deliciously springy turf which stretches for ten miles by the side of the old Roman road leading from Guildford (Tennyson's Astolat) to Farnham, along the top of the "Hog's Back," should draw rein to breathe his horse about half-way between those towns, and turning from

the well-known view of Hind Head and the Devil's Jumps on his left, look at the wide-stretching prospect on his right, he would see beneath him, nestling among trees, almost at the foot of the hill, a collection of picturesque roofs the little village, church, and manor house of Wanborough.

Relative Wildness

Although not 'wild', the land having been managed for centuries, it is tucked away. The hamlet often receives visitors who may have been local to the area for many years and driven past many times without visiting, only vaguely aware of Wanborough's existence. First time visitors are often surprised to find that such an unspoilt gem exists on their doorstep, undiscovered!

Relative Tranquillity

The hamlet has a tranquil feel of being within nature in a historical and agricultural setting,

Natural Heritage

The hamlet and surrounding fields have a large range of fauna large and small including:

- Bats (living in the Great Barn)
- Foxes
- Badgers
- Birds of prey, including buzzards, kites, owls, kestrels
- Heron
- A wide variety of garden birds
- Amphibians including toads and frogs
- Hedgehogs
- Deer
- Rodents

There are a number of specimen trees around the manor, including at least two mature sequoia, one of which was planted by Queen Victoria on a visit to the manor.

Cultural Heritage

The hamlet of Wanborough and the surrounding fields have a great wealth of cultural heritage, where to begin?

The hamlet is mentioned in the Domesday book and has a plaque to commemorate. King William took two manors from the Anglo-Saxon brothers Swegen and Leofwine, brothers of King Harold, and handed them to Geoffrey de Mandeville who combined them into one, before selling the estate to Waverley Abbey in about 1130. It stayed with the Cistercians until the dissolution of the monasteries when the manor changed hands several times before becoming a seat of the Onslows. The manor (grade II listed) was largely rebuilt in 1670 by Guildford MP Thomas Dalmahoy, heir to the fortune of the Duchess of Hamilton. It was inhabited for many years by Sir Algernon West, the Principle Private Secretary to William Gladstone. H. H. Asquith was also a resident for a time before he became Prime Minister and two of his daughters, who tragically died young, are buried in the neighbouring churchyard. During West's residence, Gladstone, Bismarck and Queen Victoria visited the manor, the latter having planted a specimen sequoia which still stands. Later, the manor was owned briefly by Ernest Travis who sold it to the Perkins family, co-founders of the Travis Perkins timber merchants.

During the war, the manor was requisitioned by the Special Operations Executive (SOE) as a school for spies of 'F' section, who were to be deployed to France. There are many stories of training operations in and around Wanborough, all in secret from the locals! This included the laying of dummy mines on the railway and sub-aqua training in the ponds of Wanborough springs. Around

half the spies trained at Wanborough were killed in the war, and a plaque in the neighbouring church commemorates the agents who lost their lives. The SOE heritage garners much interest still and last year a talk by a prominent scholar brought a large audience to the hamlet.

Post-war, and prior to becoming three private residences, the manor became a country club, popular with celebrities and rife with salacious local gossip about the parties that went on!

Next to the manor is Wanborough's charming Saxon church, St Bartholomew's (grade 1 listed). Built for the Cistercians in the 13th Century of local flint and old roman tiles, it was derelict for many years before being fully restored in 18th century by local architect Henry Woodyer. Grooves worn into the stone window surrounds still show where the locals sharpened their arrowheads many years ago. The graveyard is the resting place of Sir Algernon West.

Flowing from beneath the hamlet where the soil turns from chalk to clay is a spring of clear, fresh water that never runs dry. Until recent decades the hamlet and surrounding houses were provided with water by a hydraulic ram pump fed from the stream.

Wanborough had historically been a farming hamlet from at least Cistercian times up until the 1990's when the owner, Frank Taylor (Lord Taylor of Hadfield, founder of Taylor Woodrow housebuilder), sold the estate in lots, including the farmland. The farm buildings were tastefully developed into seven barn-style houses and the majority of the fields went to nearby estates or to the farm at West and East Flexford from where they continue to be farmed.

One of Wanborough's finest cultural assets is the Great Barn (grade II* listed), located centrally in the hamlet. The oldest and most important wooden building in Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire, it was built in 1388 by the Cistercian monks of Waverley Abbey and was still used for grain storage until the 1990's. Restored in 1997 by Guildford Borough Council, it is managed on their behalf by a local barn committee and let out for a small number of days each year for weddings, as well as being opened for Heritage weekend and other cultural events, when it never fails to draw large numbers of interested visitors. Inside, and in the adjacent converted granary, visitors are presented with a video and historical displays with information about Wanborough, the Barn, the Church, numerous local historical finds and the SOE.

The Fox Way footpath passes south-north through the western part of the parish on its circular route around Guildford, and Wanborough is frequently visited by walkers diverting from the Pilgrim's Way or Christmas Pie Trail, or following the Fox Way. A bridleway starting at the centre of the hamlet, once the main road to the hamlet, rises over Hog's Back and down through Greyfriars Vineyard to the Pilgrim's way.

We know that Wanborough was settled in pre-Roman times, and this is borne out by a number of neolithic flint artefacts that have been discovered in the surrounding fields, now in the British Museum, giving evidence of inhabitation for some 8-10,000 years. It is likely that the existence of the spring made it an excellent site for a settlement, and probably made it a site of devotion and worship.

Wanborough was probably named after a 'white barrow' (burial mound) on the Hog's Back above the hamlet, excavated in the 1966 and the finds transferred to Charterhouse. It is also said, however, that it was named after the Celtic god Woden, or even after 'woden' as the word for water (due to the spring).

Area D: East Flexford and eastwards to include Down Place and Blackwell Farm

Landscape Quality

The landscape of East Flexford and eastwards towards Guildford is farmland interspersed with woods, including a large number of mature specimen oaks.

East Flexford consists of around a dozen residences along the footpath heading down from Flexford House (grade II listed) and the track to East Flexford Farm. Currently the AONB boundary, heading east from Wanborough, cuts up south towards the Hog's Back before continuing parallel to the A31 towards Guildford, to exclude East Flexford, as shown in *Figure 10* below. Although this may have made sense when the AONB was created, there is now no apparent reason why the AONB should not extend northwards.



Figure 10: Detail of AONB boundary, East Flexford

Eastwards beyond East Flexford we find more outstanding farmland: small fields, with woods and chalkpits as a haven for wildlife. There is very sparse human habitation with the only houses being Chalkpit Cottages, the remnants of Down Place, Wellington House and the defunct Blackwell Farm.

Although a network of navigable footpaths exists from the Surrey Research Park to Wanborough and beyond, this east-west route is not passable as there is no right of way. To travel east-west from Guildford by foot or bicycle it is necessary to take the Christmas Pie trail to the north of the railway line or the Pilgrim's Way to the south of the Hog's Back. Visitors to Wanborough are frequently looking for an accessible route to Guildford and there is certainly scope for opening up access to this area for leisure; for example, a proposal at the link below from a member of the public in 2015:

https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/250710/CP573-Schedule-14-application_p1.pdf

Scenic Quality

The land from East Flexford to Guildford is fine pasture and farmland, with irregular fields as seen around the hamlet of Wanborough. It is best viewed late in the evening when the sun still shines low perpendicular to the slope of the Hog's Back and the birds are singing, the best of English countryside!

Relative Wildness

There is very little to distract from the natural wildness of the area. Although the land has been managed and farmed for centuries and the human hand can be seen at work in that way, there are few buildings or man-made structures.

Relative Tranquillity

The area is very tranquil, largely unspoilt by traffic noise from the Hog's Back and far removed from other major roads. There are very few houses, some unoccupied, and little activity beyond agriculture. A particularly secluded area.

Natural Heritage

The area is natural haven outside Guildford, rich with wildlife, with many deer and birds of prey enjoying the seclusion of the area.

Cultural Heritage

Blackwell Farm was once a significant estate of over 600 acres. It housed one of the first model farms in Surrey and is fondly recalled by children of the time.

The area once housed Down Place, a manor that was once home to the Dennis family of Dennis Specialist Vehicles, coachmakers and manufacturers for many years of the famous Guildford fire engine. Although the house was mostly demolished in 1963 to make way for the more modern Wellington House, some of the gardens and stables remain and have been restored.

Closer to the university, Manor Farm was once the site of a hunting lodge on what was then a royal deer park, created by Henry II in 1154. The lodge was visited by Edward III, Edward IV, Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. Although parts of the moat are still visible, the house was derelict by 17th century and the park was divided into farmland around 1700 AD.

Summary

Wanborough parish is surrounded by some beautiful, undeveloped land, diverse and outstanding in character, geology, flora and fauna.

Wanborough's highest priority for designation is the area that has come to be known as Wanborough Fields, and within that the priority being the strip of land adjacent to the current AONB. There is a good case for extending the AONB further north to include the northernmost field and woods, including Wanborough Wood.

In addition to Wanborough Fields, the Parish Council believe the rest of the parish, and in particular the corridor eastwards towards Guildford, meet the criteria of beauty, tranquillity and heritage required for designation.

Document Approval

This document was approved by Wanborough Parish Council on 27th January 2022

Contact Details

For further information, please contact the Parish Clerk at wanborough_pc@outlook.com

<https://www.wanboroughpc.uk/>