

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT

DATE: 25 OCTOBER 2011

REPORT OF: LISA CREAYE-GRIFFIN, COUNTRYSIDE
GROUP MANAGER

SUBJECT: PUBLIC VALUE REVIEW OF COUNTRYSIDE PARTNERSHIPS



KEY ISSUE/DECISION:

To consider the recommendations arising from the review of the County Council's involvement in Countryside Partnerships, following a formal consultation with partner bodies which was held between March and the end of May 2011.

DETAILS:

- 1 As part of the Public Value Review of the Countryside Service a report went to the Cabinet meeting on 1 March 2011. The Cabinet agreed recommendations that included a review of the County Council's involvement in Countryside Partnerships, the list of which is set out in **Annex 1**. Following a formal consultation from March to the end of May 2011, a series of recommendations have been drawn up for the Cabinet Member to consider.
- 2 The Cabinet value Surrey's countryside and are very supportive of actions to protect its natural beauty. Nonetheless, in the current economic climate it has to be careful to ensure tax payers money is directed towards its statutory duties and essential services. As part of this commitment, the Cabinet agreed recommendations set out in an Action Plan and agreed implementation should start immediately, with progress reported quarterly to the PVR Steering Board and Countryside PVR Member Reference Group.
- 3 The Cabinet also agreed the review of partnerships, as set out in Annex 2 of the 1 March 2011 report, should be issued for consultation with partner bodies, prior to a decision on the County Council's involvement by the Cabinet Member for Environment in consultation with the Assistant Director Operations, Highways and Countryside.
- 4 Details of the County Council's involvement in partnerships under review are listed in the attached table in Annex 1. All partnerships currently employ staff to carry out programmes of work. Except where indicated the host body employs the staff and administers the financial arrangements.
- 5 The review proposed Surrey County Council should apply the following tests to its involvement in Countryside partnerships:
 - a. Surrey County Council to be involved in a strategic enabling role - ie normally not to host the partnership or employ partnership staff except possibly where the partnership extends to all or a substantial part of the County area.

- b. Surrey County Council to provide financial support to partnerships only where they provide Surrey County Council statutory services or deliver Surrey County Council service priorities.
- 6 In the review these tests were applied to each partnership in which Surrey County Council currently is involved. The review made proposals for Surrey County Council's involvement from 2011 onwards. Any changes, including financial changes, would be introduced after April 2012 to align with the financial year.
 - 7 Annex 2 of the March 2011 Cabinet paper was issued for consultation on 10 March 2011 and the consultation closed on 31 May 2011. A large number of responses were received. The paragraphs below outlining the proposals set out in the text box are taken from Annex 2, which formed the consultation on each partnership, followed in each case by a summary of responses received, commentary on the responses and recommendations for the County Council's involvement and the way forward.

PARTNERSHIPS HOSTED BY SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

SURREY HILLS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
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Original Proposals

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 (1) 1.1 (2) | <p>Surrey County Council currently is the host/employing body. It was proposed Surrey County Council should continue this role because the partnership is strategic, covers between a quarter and a third of the whole area of the County, provides a statutory service and delivers Surrey County Council service priorities (protection, conservation and improvement of the AONB).</p> <p>The Surrey Hills Board is considering a reduction in its budget 2010-2014 to reflect withdrawal of funding from Natural England and pressures on local authority budgets. Subject to this it is proposed Surrey County Council should continue the current level of its financial contribution to core costs which represents the value to Surrey County Council of providing a statutory service and delivering Surrey County Council service priorities (preparation and implementation of the AONB management plan).</p> |
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Responses Received

- 8 A response was received from the Surrey Hills Board, pleased that the County Council proposed to continue the role of hosting the Surrey Hills Unit, but suggesting the Surrey Hills Unit should be placed within the Transport, Development and Planning Group. The Board welcomed continuation of the current level of County Council financial contribution.

Commentary

- 9 It is considered the Surrey Hills Unit should remain within the County Council's Countryside Group, as it is integral to the Council's policies and programmes for the countryside. Work will continue to ensure that the AONB integrate fully into the wider Countryside team.

Recommendations

- 10 The Surrey Hills Board is considering a reduction in its budget 2010-2014 to reflect withdrawal of funding from Natural England and pressures on local authority budgets. Subject to this Surrey County Council will continue the current level of its financial contribution to core costs which represents the value to Surrey County Council of providing a statutory service and delivering Surrey County Council service priorities (preparation and implementation of the AONB management plan).

LOWER MOLE, DOWNLANDS AND HEATHLAND PROJECTS:

Original Proposals

- 1.2 (1) Surrey County Council currently is the host/employing body. It is proposed
1.3 (1) Surrey County Council should cease this role because the partnership is not
1.4 (1) strategic or statutory, is a local not a county wide partnership, and could be more financially sustainable in the longer term as a charity. It is proposed the Lower Mole/Downlands/Heathland Project should transfer to an existing or new charitable trust, or (in the case of the Heathland Project) could be considered to become a Community Interest Company.

Responses Received

- 11 A very large number of responses were received in relation to the three countryside projects hosted by the County Council: the Lower Mole, Downlands and Heathland Projects. Most of the responses concerned the proposal in each case that the County Council should cease to be the host/employing body and should transfer to an existing or new charitable trust. An alternative option to be considered for the Heathland Project was a Community Interest Company. The hosting/employing staff issues are considered for all three Projects together and the financial issues considered separately below.
- 12 Specific responses were received from Natural England, the Surrey Botanical Society, Borough and District Councils, parish councils, community groups and individuals, almost all of whom were opposed to the County Council ceasing to host the three Projects and ceasing to employ the staff.
- 13 In addition a joint response was submitted by the chairmen of the three Projects on behalf of the 22 funding partners - Local authorities and other organisations - having consulted with Council Members (including County Council Members involved in specific Projects), Council officers, staff and volunteers. In summary this joint response included the following comments:
- The Projects provide a strategic approach to countryside management across Surrey and deliver the Government's "big society" by engaging with local communities and businesses.
 - The Projects could be developed to become more relevant, effective and financially resilient but not if the County Council ceases to be the host within one year.

- the County Council should work with partners to refocus activities, ensure long-term development and sustainability by:-
 - a) realigning strategic roles and core responsibilities
 - b) developing relevance to local communities
 - c) improving governance and formal agreement with funding partners
 - d) rationalising working arrangements to identify “economies of scale” and value for money.

Commentary

- 15 The joint response from the Chairmen of the Projects is very welcome. The view they express that changes to the hosting/employing staff arrangements could not be achieved within one year is a fair assessment. The County Council agrees that the three Projects could work collaboratively across the County, realigning their roles and rationalising working arrangements to become more locally relevant, financially resilient and sustainable.
- 16 In other parts of the Country organisations such as the three Countryside Projects have successfully transferred to local charities taking advantage of the increased access to funding, a higher profile, stronger identity and more local support, not easily available to local authority arrangements. Experience elsewhere has also shown that larger charities can be more robust and small charities can struggle, therefore the County Council will work with other partners to assess the best future structure for the Countryside Management Projects.

Recommendations

- 17 The County Council accepts the chairmen’s offer to work together with them and the partners to find appropriate ways forward, potentially including jointly funding external advice. This work should report back early in 2012/13 for implementation during that year.

LOWER MOLE COUNTRYSIDE PROJECT: Funding
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Original Proposals

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| 1.2 (2) | It is proposed Surrey County Council should reduce its financial contribution by one third to more closely represent the value to Surrey County Council of delivery of Surrey County Council service priorities (management of Surrey County Council land and maintenance of rights of way). |
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Responses

- 18 A large number of responses were received to this proposal, many of which were opposed to the County Council reducing its financial contribution, because the respondents felt this would make the Project less financially resilient and reduce its ability to carry out a large and essential work programme.

Commentary

- 19 If the County Council reduces its funding to the Lower Mole Project by one third this would bring its contribution into line with the funding made available to the Downlands and to the Heathland Projects. In addition if the proposals from the joint response discussed above, to do with rationalising working arrangements and economies of scale are progressed a County Council reduction need not necessarily lead to a reduction in work programme.

Recommendations

- 20 From April 2012, the County Council will reduce its financial contribution to the Lower Mole Project by one third (£15,000) to more closely represent the value to Surrey County Council of delivery of Surrey County Council service priorities (management of Surrey County Council land and maintenance of rights of way).

DOWNLANDS COUNTRYSIDE PROJECT: Funding

Original Proposals

1.3(2) It is proposed Surrey County Council should continue the current level of its financial contribution which represents the value to Surrey County Council of delivery of Surrey County Council service priorities (management of Surrey County Council land and maintenance of rights of way). Costs of Surrey County Council office accommodation should be recouped.

Responses Received

- 21 Although the proposal for the County Council to continue the current level of funding to the Downlands Project was welcomed, there was opposition from a number of respondees to the proposal to recoup office accommodation due to the additional cost this would impose and the consequent effect on the work programme.

Commentary

- 22 Accounting for the cost of office accommodation would not only be in line with County Council policy, but would put the Downlands Project on a similar footing to the Lower Mole Project and the Surrey Hills Unit where office costs are accounted for within their budgets. If the proposals discussed above to rationalise working arrangements are progressed this could lead to changes to Downland's office needs.

Recommendations

- 23 The County Council will continue the current level of its financial contribution, which represents the value to Surrey County Council of delivery of Surrey County Council service priorities (management of Surrey County Council land and maintenance of rights of way).
- 24 The costs of Surrey County Council office accommodation will be accounted for from April 2012.

SURREY HEATHLAND PROJECT: Funding

Original Proposals

- 1.4 (2) It is proposed Surrey County Council should continue the current level of its financial contribution which represents the value to Surrey County Council of delivery of Surrey County Council service priorities (management of Surrey County Council land). Costs of Surrey County Council office accommodation should be recouped.

Responses Received

- 25 The responses received concentrated on the costs to the Project if the County Council ceased to be the host and the additional cost to the Project if office accommodation was recouped.

Commentary

- 26 Whether the County Council should continue to host the Project is discussed in paragraphs 10 to 16 above. Similar to the Downlands Project accounting for office costs would bring the Heathland Project into line with the Lower Mole Project and the Surrey Hills Unit, and there could be rationalised working arrangements.

Recommendations

- 27 The County Council will continue the current level of its financial contribution, which represents the value to Surrey County Council of delivery of Surrey County Council service priorities (management of Surrey County Council land).
- 28 Costs of Surrey County Council office accommodation will be accounted for from April 2012.

SURREY WILDLIFE TRUST CONTRACT

COUNTRYSIDE ESTATE

Original Proposals

- 2.1 (1) Surrey Wildlife Trust is the employing body.
- 2.1 (2) Surrey County Council owns 2600 ha of the Countryside Estate and has access agreements with private owners over a further 1,400 ha. Surrey County Council has a 50 year legal agreement with Surrey Wildlife Trust for them to lease and manage Surrey County Council's land and manage the access agreements. This includes fully repairing all Surrey County Council's buildings and structures. It is proposed to review the access agreements so that income primarily from the introduction of parking charges, would cover the costs of management. It is proposed immediately to begin a review of the property and land holding leased to Surrey Wildlife Trust to ensure the retention of assets including land, buildings and farms is justified by their public access benefit or income potential, and where appropriate it is proposed to withdraw assets from the contract. Following these reviews the County Council will agree the contract payment.

Responses Received

- 29 Responses were received from Surrey Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Surrey Botanical Society and one individual. The Surrey Wildlife Trust response includes the following comments in relation to the proposals:
- the Trust was pleased to see the County Council continuing support for the access agreements, which the Trust has managed efficiently, providing greater value for money, including investing in Newlands Corner Visitor Centre with a 500% increase in visitors over 10 years.
 - Introducing car park charges, whilst an acceptable concept in the long-term, would require significant resources, time to undertake consultations, would be unpopular leading to increased complaints and would require investment in facilities and management of issues such as displacement and illegal parking on common land; not all car parks have the potential to raise worthwhile funds and the proposal would require the Trust's formal agreement and participation, and income to facilitate site improvements.
 - The Trust cannot support a reduction in properties held because this would undermine the established composition of the estate, reduce resources and constitute a fundamental change in the management of the contract.
 - The Trust does not consider there is a need for another contract review so soon after the comprehensive review in 2010.
- 29 Natural England is concerned that a reduction in funding would adversely affect maintenance and enhancement of SSSIs (which are 75% of the estate). The RSPB, Surrey Botanical Society and the individual response agree with the proposal to review the property and land holding provided that any changes do not reduce public access and biodiversity benefits.

Commentary

- 30 It is accepted that introduction of car park charges would need to be undertaken with adequate consultation with all stakeholders including access agreement owners, Surrey Wildlife Trust and car park users. It is also agreed that not all car parks are appropriate for charging as in some, the costs would be greater than the income. Investment would be needed not only in charging infrastructure but also in some appropriate enhancements. However, preliminary work by the Council has indicated significant income potential in some sites.
- 31 The Council's own review of Countryside Estate properties has shown that in some cases not only would it be feasible to withdraw properties from the contract without affecting the integrity of the Estate, but this would also make considerable financial sense as the cost of ongoing repairs would significantly outweigh the income from the property or other public benefits.
- 32 In relation to the proposal to renegotiate the contract it is agreed that there is no case to revisit the conclusions of the 2010 review, but changes agreed in that review, together with changes following the Countryside Estate property review should be adequately reflected in the legal agreement.

Recommendations

- 33 The County Council will:
- Review the access agreements so that income (primarily from the introduction of parking charges) would cover the costs of management.
 - Immediately begin a review of the property and land holding leased to Surrey Wildlife Trust to ensure the retention of assets including land, buildings and farms is justified by their public access benefit or income potential, and where appropriate it is proposed to withdraw assets from the contract.
 - Following these reviews, agree the new contract payment.

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL PARTNER: ANOTHER BODY AS HOST

HIGH WEALD AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

Original Proposal

- 3.1 (1) East Sussex County Council currently is the host/employing body.
- 3.1(2) It is proposed Surrey County Council should continue the current level of its financial contribution to core costs which represents the value to Surrey County Council of providing a statutory service and delivering Surrey County Council service priorities (preparation and implementation of the AONB management plan). There is a separate High Weald projects budget and Surrey County Council should continue not to contribute to project costs as this is a very small area of the County with limited opportunities for project work.

Responses Received

- 34 There were no responses on this proposal.

Recommendations

- 35 The County Council will continue the current level of its financial contribution to core costs which represents the value to Surrey County Council of providing a statutory service and delivering Surrey County Council service priorities (preparation and implementation of the AONB management plan).
- 36 The County Council will continue its policy not to contribute to project costs as this is a very small area of the County with limited opportunities for project work.

BLACKWATER VALLEY COUNTRYSIDE PARTNERSHIP

Original Proposals

- 3.2 (1) Hampshire County Council currently is the host/employing body.
- 3.2 (2) It is proposed Surrey County Council should continue the current level of its financial contribution to Partnership core costs which represents the value to Surrey County Council of delivery of Surrey County Council service priorities (management of Surrey County Council land and maintenance of rights of way). Surrey County Council should reduce by three fifths the cost of maintenance by the Blackwater Valley Project of the Blackwater Valley Road landscape.

Responses Received

- 37 Responses were received from the Chairman of the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership and the Surrey Botanical Society. The response from the Blackwater Partnership welcomed the continuing commitment of Surrey County Council to core costs and emphasised that the Blackwater Countryside Partnership delivers many services and facilities used by Surrey residents in the Blackwater Valley as a whole. In relation to the maintenance of the Blackwater Valley Road landscape a reduction of three fifths the cost of maintenance would have a substantial effect on what can be delivered and the landscape, ecology and public access would suffer.

Commentary

- 38 The Blackwater Valley Road landscape was established 15 years ago and has substantially matured by now. The larger budget for landscape establishment is no longer appropriate for long-term maintenance. A long-term management plan is to be produced and it is considered the reduced budget will be adequate to implement this.

Recommendations

- 39 The County Council will continue the current level of its financial contribution to Blackwater Valley Partnership core costs, which represents the value to Surrey County Council of delivery of Surrey County Council service priorities (management of Surrey County Council land and maintenance of rights of way).
- 40 The County Council will reduce by three fifths the cost of maintenance (saving £31,000) by the Blackwater Valley Project of the Blackwater Valley Road landscape from 1 April 2012.

GATWICK GREENSPACE PARTNERSHIP

Original Proposals

- 3.3 (1) Sussex Wildlife Trust is the host/employing body.
- 3.3 (2) It is proposed Surrey County Council should continue the current level of its financial contribution which represents the value to Surrey County Council of delivery of Surrey County Council service priorities (maintenance of rights of way).

Responses Received

- 41 Responses were received from the Chairman of the Gatwick Greenspace Partnership and the Surrey Botanical Society, welcoming the proposals. The Project gives good value for money.

Recommendations

- 42 The County Council will continue the current level of its financial contribution, which represents the value to Surrey County Council of delivery of Surrey County Council service priorities (maintenance of rights of way).

COLNE VALLEY PARTNERSHIP

Original Proposals

- 3.4 (1) Buckinghamshire County Council is the host and Groundwork Thames Valley is the employing body.
- 3.4 (2) It is proposed Surrey County Council should withdraw from the Colne Valley Partnership because it does not provide a statutory service or deliver Surrey County Council service priorities, and because the current arrangements are unsustainable with other partners not prepared to maintain their financial contributions.

Responses Received

- 43 Responses were received from Groundwork Thames Valley, Spelthorne Borough Council and the Colne Valley Partnership. Groundwork Thames Valley and the Partnership both stressed the importance of local authorities working together to respond to planning applications, but agrees that the current arrangements are unsustainable. These arrangements are undergoing change to establish a more sustainable operating structure that will not be wholly reliant on core funding from local authorities. Surrey County Council could support the Partnership through robust planning policies for minerals and waste and securing developers contributions to fund appropriate projects in the Park. The new Partnership would be able to deliver maintenance and improvements to public rights of way in the area. The Partnership is concerned that withdrawal of one of the founding partners may have an adverse effect on the contributions from other partners. Their response set out the success the partnership has had in attracting funding and highlighted the objectives of the proposed new Community Interest Company (CIC)
- 44 Spelthorne Borough Council urged the County Council to continue to financially support the Colne Valley Partnership through its transition to become financially self-sustaining or to fund through the Partnership specific projects in the Park such as rights of way.

Commentary

- 45 The Colne Valley Partnership is making progress in transferring the structure of the Partnership to a CIC. This should give the Partnership a greater chance of becoming self sustaining. However the County Council has had to

look at all its partnerships and make savings and in this case the partnership covers only a small area of the County and is not felt to be strategic to the County as a whole and therefore the contribution should be withdrawn from 2012/13,. Specific work on public rights of way can be funded by the County Council through the rights of way budget.

Recommendations

- 46 The County Council will withdraw from the Colne Valley Partnership (saving £3000) because it does not provide a statutory service or deliver Surrey County Council service priorities and because the current arrangements are unsustainable with other partners not prepared to maintain their financial contributions.

THAMES LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

Original Proposals

- 3.5 (1) Royal Borough of Richmond upon Thames is the host/employing body.
- 3.5 (2) It is proposed Surrey County Council should withdraw from the Thames Landscape Strategy because it does not provide a statutory service or deliver Surrey County Council service priorities (Hurst Park in the Thames Landscape Strategy area is owned by Surrey County Council but managed by Elmbridge Borough Council)

Responses Received

- 47 Responses were received from the Chairman of the Thames Landscape Strategy Community Advisory Group, past Chairman of the Members Review Group, Royal Parks, Elmbridge Borough Council and from a Surrey County Councillor. The responses stressed the value of the River Thames to Surrey and the value of the practical work and volunteer input into such projects as towpath repairs. It was also pointed out that the Strategy area has recently been extended upstream to Weybridge so the Surrey stretch is now one third of the total area.

Commentary

- 48 It is accepted the Thames Landscape Strategy now extends to a much longer stretch of the River in Surrey. It is considered the Strategy team does undertake valuable practical work and could now deliver Surrey County Council service priorities in maintaining rights of way.

Recommendations

- 49 Surrey County Council should remain in the Thames Landscape Strategy subject to written agreement (by December 2011) that the Thames Landscape Strategy team deliver County Council service priorities.

BASINGSTOKE CANAL

Original Proposals

- 3.6 (1) Hampshire County Council is the host/employing body.
- 3.6 (2) Surrey County Council owns the Surrey half of the Canal and Hampshire County Council owns the Hampshire stretch. Surrey County Council is financially responsible for repair of the Canal structure in Surrey. The Canal structure is uninsurable by any other body due to the liabilities and risks. It is proposed Surrey County Council will continue to repair the Canal structure in Surrey. It is believed the current management arrangements (not including structural repair) are unsustainable because they are not cost effective and Borough and District Council funding partners are not prepared to maintain their financial contributions. It is proposed that management of the Canal (not including structural repair) should be transferred to one or more other bodies, which could provide a more cost effective service, be focused on income generation and be more financially sustainable. It is proposed Surrey County Council should reduce its financial contribution to the current management arrangements (not including structural repairs) by about one fifth to more closely represent the value to Surrey County Council of delivery of Surrey County Council service priorities (management of the SSSI, management of the navigation and the towpath).

Responses Received

- 50 Responses were received from the Chairman of the Surrey and Hampshire Canal Society, Natural England, RSPB and the Surrey Botanical Society. There was also a related discussion at the Basingstoke Canal Joint Management Committee (JMC) meeting on 17 June 2011. The Society is opposed to the proposals: sub-contracting the management of the Canal is a highly sensitive issue, which requires full and open discussion with all stakeholders. The Canal Society is very anxious to move forward with partners to bring the Canal back into full operating condition, in generating additional income to cover expected shortfalls in local authority funding and in making a success of the waterway. Natural England asserts that any change to management of the Canal should rectify the declining status of the SSSI. Increasing boat traffic and recreational use to maximise income may have a deleterious effect on the SSSI.
- 51 The discussion at the JMC focussed on the need for all partners to work together to rethink the structure and strategy of the partnership. Views were expressed that the local authorities currently need to reduce their budgets, but should not do so unilaterally.

Commentary

- 52 The JMC seems to share the view that currently the partnership arrangements are not working as they should. The arrangements do need to be reviewed and a new structure and strategy agreed by all partners. This review will be led by the current Chairman of the JMC, who is a Surrey County Councillor. In view of the critical need to manage the shared risks inherent in the Canal, in partnership with the other owner – Hampshire

County Council – it is considered that any reduction in funding should be agreed jointly with Hampshire County Council.

Recommendations

- 53 That it be agreed in principal that the partners will review the partnership to find a more financially sustainable way forward. This will include a a joint review of management arrangements and any reduction in Surrey County Council funding wouldbe agreed with Hampshire County Council.
- 54 The County Council will:
- Continue with the current capital programme to repair the Canal structure in Surrey.
 - Due to the level of savings required across the Countryside Service the County Council will work in partnership to find a way forward that reduces the Canal Authority’s reliance on public sector funding.

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL GRANT

FRIENDS OF THE HURTWOOD

Original Proposals

Responses Received

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| <p>4.1 (1) Friends of the Hurtwood is the host/employing body.</p> <p>4.1 (2) It is proposed Surrey County Council should withdraw from the Friends of the Hurtwood because it does not provide a statutory service or deliver Surrey County Council service priorities, (the Hurtwood is privately owned and Surrey County Council does not have any access agreement with the owners).</p> |
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- 55 Responses were received from the Chairman of the Friends of the Hurtwood, from the Surrey Hills Board and from the Surrey Botanical Society. The Chairman of the Friends points out that the grant from the County Council goes towards Surrey County Council service priorities in maintaining rights of way running through the Hurtwood. The Surrey Hills Board considers the Hurtwood offers Surrey residents and visitors greater value for money than the land over which the County Council has access agreements. The Botanical Society echoes this view.

Commentary

- 56 It is accepted that the Friends of the Hurtwood do currently deliver some County Council service priorities in maintaining public rights of way. However, this could be funded from the County Council’s rights of way budget. It is considered that the Hurtwood is particularly appreciated by Surrey residents and visitors. However, the approach of this Public Value Review to the costs of managing access agreement land is to propose introduction of car park charges to offset the costs of the service. It is considered the County Council could offer the Friends of the Hurtwood help to introduce car park charges on the Hurtwood to make funding of management more self-sustaining.

Recommendations

- 57 Surrey County Council will withdraw from the Friends of the Hurtwood (saving £5,000) because it does not provide a statutory service or deliver Surrey County Council service priorities, (the Hurtwood is privately owned and Surrey County Council does not have any access agreement with the owners).
- 58 The County Council will offer the Friends of the Hurtwood advice on the introduction of car park charges.

SURREY FARMING AND WILDLIFE ADVISORY GROUP (FWAG)

Original Proposals

- 4.2 (1) The Surrey and Hampshire Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group is the host/employing body.
- 4.2 (2) It is proposed Surrey County Council should withdraw from funding the Surrey FWAG, because it does not provide a statutory service or deliver Surrey County Council service priorities.

Responses Received

- 59 Responses were received from Natural England, The Surrey Botanical Society and the RSPB, who said Surrey FWAG provided valuable advice to farmers and delivers the Council's statutory duty to further the conservation of biodiversity and bring designated sites into management agreements.

Commentary

- 60 It is acknowledged Surrey FWAG does provide valuable advice to farmers. However, it is not a statutory duty for the County Council to assist all with biodiversity advice. The Council furthers the conservation of biodiversity in other ways such as by supporting the Surrey Biodiversity Partnership.

Recommendations

- 61 The County Council will withdraw from funding the Surrey FWAG (saving £4,000), because it does not provide a statutory service or deliver Surrey County Council service priorities.

SURREY RURAL PARTNERSHIP

Original Proposals

4.3 (1) Surrey Community Action is the host/employing body.

4.3 (2) It is proposed Surrey County Council should continue the current level of its financial contribution to Partnership core costs because this represents the value to Surrey County Council of providing a strategic service and delivering Surrey County Council service priorities (implementing the Surrey Rural Strategy – part of the Surrey Strategic Partnership’s ‘The Partnership Plan’). Surrey County Council’s Officer involvement in the Surrey Rural Partnership should transfer from Surrey County Council’s Countryside Group to the Environment and Infrastructure Strategy Group. Surrey County Council should withdraw from funding the rural towns programme in 2012 when the current programme finishes.

Responses Received

62 A response was received from the Chairman of the Surrey Rural Partnership. The Chairman states the Partnership values the County Council’s support, and the Council’s funding to the Partnership’s very low overheads, levers funding from other partners and enables a very large inward investment to Surrey, as well as a Partnership contribution to a number of County Council initiatives, including Transport for Surrey and Superfast Broadband Delivery. The Partnership is disappointed that it is proposed to withdraw funding from the Rural Towns Programme which has attracted hundreds of thousands of pounds of external investment to several of the County’s market towns.

Commentary

63 It is considered the Surrey Rural Partnership does, in general, deliver a uniquely valuable service to the County. However in 2012 the County Council would be the only funding partner to the Rural Towns Programme, as the financial support from SEEDA will have ceased.

Recommendations

64 The County Council will continue the current level of its financial contribution to Partnership core costs because this represents the value to Surrey County Council of providing a strategic service and delivering Surrey County Council service priorities (implementing the Surrey Rural Strategy – part of the Surrey Strategic Partnership’s ‘The Partnership Plan’).

65 The County Council will withdraw from funding the rural towns programme in 2012 (saving £22,000) when the current programme finishes. If other funding from external sources is found, the County Council’s involvement could be reconsidered.

SURREY BIODIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

Original Proposals

- 4.4 (1) Surrey Wildlife Trust is the host/employing body.
- 4.4 (2) Surrey County Council contributes financially to the employment of the Surrey Biodiversity Co-ordinator and to the Surrey Biological Records Centre, both of which are hosted by Surrey Wildlife Trust. It is proposed Surrey County Council should continue the current level of its financial contribution, but paid as one rather than two grants, with a service level agreement to cover both areas of work. The financial contribution represents the value to Surrey County Council of providing a statutory service and delivering Surrey County Council service priorities (implementing the Surrey Biodiversity Action Plan and maintaining the County's biological records).

Responses Received

- 66 Responses were received from Natural England, Surrey Wildlife Trust, Surrey Botanical Society and the RSPB. All welcomed the Council's support and funding for the Biodiversity Partnership and the Biological Records Centre, which deliver excellent value.

Recommendations

- 67 The County Council will continue the current level of its financial contribution, but paid as one rather than two grants, with a service level agreement to cover both areas of work. The financial contribution represents the value to Surrey County Council of providing a statutory service and delivering Surrey County Council service priorities (implementing the Surrey Biodiversity Action Plan and maintaining the County's biological records).

GREENSPACE SOUTH EAST

Original Proposals

- 4.5 (1) Greenspace is the host/employing body.
- 4.5 (2) It is proposed Surrey County Council should continue its current financial contribution because this represents the value to Surrey County Council of providing a strategic service and assisting delivery of Surrey County Council service priorities (developing co-operation with other local authorities on shared green space management, including benchmarking of service delivery, contracts and procurement).

- 68 A response was received from the Chairman of Greenspace South East saying Greenspace was very pleased with the recommendation that the Council should remain a funding partner.

Recommendations

- 69 The County Council will continue its current financial contribution because this represents the value to Surrey County Council of providing a strategic service and assisting delivery of Surrey County Council service priorities (developing co-operation with other local authorities on shared green space management, including benchmarking of service delivery, contracts and procurement)

Consultation

- 70 Formal consultation was held with all the partnerships to test the original proposals and to assess if there were any alternative ways of making the necessary savings. The paragraphs above set out a summary of the responses to the consultation.
- 71 Consultation also took place with the Cabinet Member for Environment.

Financial and value for money implications

- 72 The Countryside Public Value Review resulted in agreed savings from the Countryside Partnerships Budget for 2012/13 of £177,000 and further savings required by 2014/15. The proposals set out above will deliver £80,000 from the smaller partnerships and £50,000 from the Countryside Estate Management contract with Surrey Wildlife Trust. The remainder relies on the reviews of the partnership with the Basingstoke Canal and ongoing work on the Countryside Management Projects to find a sustainable way forward that is not reliant on the current level of contributions from the County Council.

Equalities implications

- 73 This will not disadvantage any particular sector of the community.

Risk management implications

- 74 The main risks to the partnerships associated with implementing the funding reduction is that other partners may also reduce their funding next year and some projects may become unsustainable. As stated above the partnerships have been assessed based on their value to the County as a whole and particularly based on the statutory role of the County Council in each area, this reduces the risk of the decisions to the County Council.
- 75 If the savings are not found via the proposed reviews and generating income then there would be reductions in the service provided by the partnerships that the County Council regards as important to deliver the overall countryside service. The precise reductions in service are hard to assess until the reviews have been completed.

Implications for the Council's Community Strategy priorities

- 76 The partnerships that the County Council will continue to support are those which will help the most to maintain our beautiful environment and encourage people to engage in maintaining the environment from increasing physical activity to encouraging people to help in all aspects of running the partnerships as volunteers.

Climate change/carbon emissions implications

- 77 The County Council attaches great importance to being environmentally aware and wishes to show leadership in cutting carbon emissions and tackling climate change.

78 These proposals will have neutral impact on these aspects. The partnerships that are being supported will continue to be involved in extending the amount of green space that is properly managed and improving access both of which will encourage people to access land closer to home and reduce the need to travel to the wider countryside. In some cases the partnerships are also looking at more sustainable forms of transport.

Legal implications/legislative requirements

79 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Section 151 Officer commentary

80 The S151 Officer confirms that all material financial and business issues & risks have been considered in this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that the Cabinet Member agree:

1. That the recommendations set out above are agreed to achieve the initial £63,000 savings for 2012/13.
2. That the proposed reviews to ensure the sustainability of the Partnerships that the County Council continues to support take place during 2012 and progress is reported back to the Cabinet Member during 2012/13 for implementation in 2013/14.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

The recommendations are designed to ensure that the County Council only directly supports those partnerships that deliver Surrey County Council statutory services or deliver Surrey County Council service priorities.

In addition they are designed to ensure that the County Council continues to have a strategic enabling role rather than hosts partnerships in the future.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

A copy of the section of this report relevant to each partnership has been sent to the Chairman, lead officer and Surrey County Councillors on the partnership in advance of this report so that any further comments could be collated before the meeting.

The next step is to implement the savings and start the detailed review process on moving the partnerships to a more sustainable basis.

Contact Officer:

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Consulted:

A formal consultation was held with partner bodies as set out in the body of the report

Informed:

The Surrey County Council Members on the partnerships have been informed of the proposals and were asked for any comments prior to the Cabinet Member Decision Meeting.

Sources/background papers:

Cabinet report and minutes - 1 March 2011
Consultation documents and correspondence

Countryside Partnerships Summary Table

Partnership	What is it?	Host/ Employing Body	Total Partners (Funding Partners)	Staff (FTE)	Total funding income (2011/12 Estimates)	% Funding SCC (2011/12)	SCC Contribution (2011/12)	Proposed Funding From SCC (2012/13)	Savings
					£000s		£000s	£000s	£000s
1 Surrey CC Host									
1.1 Surrey Hills AONB	AONB partnership	Surrey County Council	13(8)	6.4	304.0	9%	34.0	34.0	0.0
1.2 Lower Mole Countryside Project	Urban fringe countryside management project	Surrey County Council	7 (6)	4			47.0	32.0	15.0
1.3 Downlands Countryside Project	Urban fringe/habitat countryside management project	Surrey County Council	7 (6)	5	261.0	12%	32.0	32.0	0.0
1.4 Surrey Heathlands Project	Habitat based countryside management project	Surrey County Council	14 (8)	2	110.0	26%	29.0	29.0	0.0

Partnership	What is it?	Host/ Employing Body	Total Partners (Funding Partners)	Staff (FTE)	Total funding income (2011/12 Estimates)	% Funding SCC (2011/12)	SCC Contribution (2011/12)	Proposed Funding From SCC (2012/13)	Savings
					£000s		£000s	£000s	£000s
2 Surrey CC Contract									
2.1 Countryside Estate	Lease and management of SCC land and management of access agreements	Surrey Wildlife Trust	5 (2)	30	2,027.0	51%	1,004.0	954.0	50.0
3 Surrey CC Partner: Another Body as Host									
3.1 High Weald AONB	AONB Partnership	East Sussex County Council	16 (16)	8	360.0	0.80%	2.9	2.9	0.0
3.2 Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership	Urban fringe countryside management project – also manages BVR landscape	Hampshire County Council	13 (13)	5		7%	13.0	13.0	0.0
Blackwater Valley Road (BVR)					52.0	(BVR – 100%)	52.0	21.0	31.0
3.3 Gatwick Greenspace Partnership	Urban fringe countryside management project	Sussex Wildlife Trust	8 (8)	3			13.0	13.0	0.0

Partnership	What is it?	Host/ Employing Body	Total Partners (Funding Partners)	Staff (FTE)	Total funding income (2011/12 Estimates)	% Funding SCC (2011/12)	SCC Contribution (2011/12)	Proposed Funding From SCC (2012/13)	Savings
					£000s		£000s	£000s	£000s
3.4 Colne Valley Partnership	Regional partnership	Buckinghamshire CC	10 (10)	3.3	54.0	6%	3.0	0.0	3.0
3.5 Thames Landscape Strategy	Regional landscape and access partnership	RB Richmond upon Thames	15 (15)	5	113.0	2.60%	3.0	3.0	0.0
3.6 Basingstoke Canal	Canal management	Hampshire County Council	12 (8)	15	719.0	22%	153.0	153.0	0.0
4 Surrey CC Grant									
4.1 Friends of the Hurtwood	Land and access management charity	Friends of the Hurtwood	9 (9)	1	65.0	8%	5.0	0.0	5.0
4.2 Surrey and Hants Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group	Agricultural advisory charity	Surrey and Hants Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group	5 (5)	3.66	111.0	3.50%	4.0	0.0	4.0
4.3 Surrey Rural Partnership	Strategic partnership – also manages rural towns programme	Surrey Community Action	32 (7)	1	10.0	25%	2.5	2.5	0.0

Partnership	What is it?	Host/ Employing Body	Total Partners (Funding Partners)	Staff (FTE)	Total funding income (2011/12 Estimates)	% Funding SCC (2011/12)	SCC Contribution (2011/12)	Proposed Funding From SCC (2012/13)	Savings
					£000s		£000s	£000s	£000s
(Rural Towns)			3	1	86.0	(rural towns 26%)	22.0	0.0	22.0
4.4 Surrey Biodiversity Partnership	Strategic partnership and records centre	Surrey Wildlife Trust	12 (4)	1.5	90.0	20%	18.0	18.0	0.0
4.5 Green Space South East	Strategic partnership and benchmarking group	Green Space	25 (25)	0.6	35.0	4%	1.5	1.5	0.0
Total Savings									130.0