

CABINET MEMBER DECISION

Decision:

(i) Details of decision

PROCEDURAL MATTERS: PETITION

That the response attached at Appendix 1 be agreed.

(ii) Reasons for decision

To respond to the petition.

(iii) Details of any alternative options considered and rejected

None

(iv) Details of any consultation and representations received not included in the published report

Mrs Pamela Harwood presented the petition which had 659 signatures and she tabled a paper copy of her presentation at the meeting.

Key points from her presentation were:

- The contribution of 30,000 volunteer hours a year to countryside work in Surrey County Council
- The strategic importance of the project's work
- The Lower Mole Project had been nominated for a No.10 Downing Street Big Society Award
- The claim that projects would be better run as charities was unsubstantiated
- The difficulties of establishing a charity in the current financial climate.

The Cabinet Member for Environment referred to her written response, which explained the process and said that the County Council was currently evaluating the responses received during the consultation process, which had recently finished. She said that the Public Value Review had examined options such as whether 'back office' functions could be operated more efficiently.

The Cabinet Member also said that the County Council had received a large number of responses and all suggestions would be considered. She confirmed that she did not want to compromise the good work of the Trust and the work undertaken on the ground.

The Landscape and Access Team Manager stated that the County Council had been looking at best practice and been benchmarking this service against other local authorities.

Other County Councillors in attendance: Mr Chris Frost.

Conflicts of Interest

(Any conflict of interest declared by any other Cabinet Member consulted in relation to the decision to be recorded)

None

Dispensation

(Any dispensation granted by the Standards Committee in respect of any declared conflict of interest to be noted)

None

Decision taken by:

(i) Name: Lynne Hack

(ii) Portfolio: Environment

Date of Decision: 11 July 2011

Date of Publication of Record of Decision: 12 July 2011

Date decision effective (i.e. 5 days after date of publication of record of decision unless subject to call-in by the Environment and Transport Select Committee): 20 July 2011

CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT

RESPONSE TO PETITION CONCERNING CEASING TO HOST THREE COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT PROJECTS

The Petition

'We the undersigned petition Surrey County Council to not cease to host the 3 Countryside Management Projects without carrying out proper investigation to prove this move would not negatively impact on the valuable nature conservation work being carried out by the projects and local community volunteers.'

As part of the Public Value Review paper presented to the Surrey Council Cabinet it has been proposed that, from April 2012, SCC should cease to host the 3 Countryside Management Projects, the Lower Mole Project, the Downlands Project and the Heathland Project. This means SCC would no longer employ project staff, provide HR and IT support, payroll services or insurance. An enormous amount of work is done throughout Surrey by volunteers of these projects and it will be a serious loss to Surrey residents and a drain on Partners' budgets should these groups cease to exist. SCC is suggesting the projects are hosted by charitable trusts. These proposals were made without researching the viability of transferring the projects to trusts, identifying any trusts willing and able to host them or establishing a process whereby a new charitable trust might be set up. If a decision to go ahead with the proposal is made there will be no going back, even if it is not possible to find another host for the staff. There are grave concerns that this important decision will be taken by only 2 people, one an elected member and one an officer.

RESPONSE

Thank you for expressing your concerns about the proposal, as part of the Public Value Review of the Countryside Service, that the County Council should cease to host the three Countryside Management Projects: the Lower Mole, the Downlands and the Heathland Projects.

The report on the Countryside Public Value Review was considered by the County Council's Cabinet on 1 March 2011. The Cabinet agreed a number of recommendations including that the review of partnerships 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. The consultation was issued on 10 March 2011 and closed on 2 June 2011. The review of partnerships includes a review of the Lower Mole, Downlands and Heathland Projects. The consultation was sent to all partner bodies, including those Members, Officers and others who are on the respective Steering Groups.

The responses to the consultation will be carefully considered prior to a decision on the County Council's involvement being made, which will take full account of responses to the consultation.

Dr Lynne Hack, Cabinet Member for Environment
11 July 2011

CABINET MEMBER DECISION

Decision:

(i) Details of decision

AGREEMENT TO USE VALLEY END, CHOBHAM AS SUITABLE ALTERNATIVE NATURAL GREENSPACE (SANG)

That Valley End, Chobham be approved for use as Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace in conjunction with the residential development proposed to be built at Summerwood and Pucksfield, Charters Road, Sunningdale

(ii) Reasons for decision

The use of Valley End as a SANG has previously been agreed and established and this will enable public access to the site to be improved together with interpretation, seating and habitat management at no additional cost to the County Council.

Valley End, Chobham meets the County Council's criteria for use as Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space and is capable of supporting the further application at Summerwood and Pucksfield, Charters Road, Sunningdale.

(iii) Details of any alternative options considered and rejected

None

(iv) Details of any consultation and representations received not included in the published report

None

Conflicts of Interest

(Any conflict of interest declared by any other Cabinet Member consulted in relation to the decision to be recorded)

None

Dispensation

(Any dispensation granted by the Standards Committee in respect of any declared conflict of interest to be noted)

None

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