



# **NORTH DOWNS LANDSCAPE RESTORATION & ENHANCEMENT PROJECT**

## **SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL LOCAL COMMITTEE (GUILDFORD)**

**15<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2006**

### **KEY ISSUE**

This report outlines major landscape restoration proposals for the Newlands Corner and Albury Downs area of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and seeks the views of the Committee on proposals that affect the A25.

### **SUMMARY**

At the centre of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is Newlands Corner which offers some of the most beautiful and inspirational views in South East England. Due to changes in land management over time, scrub has invaded much of the access land, partially or wholly obscuring these views, and reducing its nature conservation value. The A25 runs through the area and the high traffic flows mean that visitors are discouraged from accessing the eastern part of the area which is crossed by the North Downs Way National Trail. A project is being taken forward to open up the views by removing scrub and re-introducing grazing across the entire area. Integral to achieving this vision is to consider appropriate traffic management measures on the A25.

### **Report by**

### **Surrey Atlas Ref.**

SENIOR LOCAL TRANSPORTATION  
MANAGER

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### **GUILDFORD B.C. WARD(S)**

### **COUNTY ELECTORAL DIVISION(S)**

TILLINGBOURNE

SHERE

## **OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee is asked:

- (i) to agree that the report be noted
- (ii) to put forward their views as to whether the traffic management measures described in outline in the report are feasible, and if so what types of measure might be considered appropriate, to enable further investigation.

## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

- 1 The Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a nationally designated landscape having equal landscape status and protection to a National Park. All public bodies have a duty of regard to protect and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB and local authorities, under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, are empowered “to take such action that appears to them expedient for the accomplishment of the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB” and for promoting its public understanding and enjoyment. The Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan (2004) sets out policies and programmes to ensure that these duties are implemented.
- 2 The AONB Management Plan describes the area to the east of Guildford, which includes parts of the North Downs and Tillingbourne valley, as having an isolated, wild feel, with pockets of open farmland contained within a mosaic of woodland, shaws and hedgerows. Being on the scarp slope of the North Downs, it offers panoramic views south across the Tillingbourne Valley towards the Greensand Hills. These are considered some of the most beautiful and inspirational views in South East England.
- 3 This area of the Surrey Hills (see **FIGURE 1**, attached) includes 871 hectares (2,159 acres) of public open space and 361 hectares (890 acres) of SSSI. When the AONB was designated in 1958, this part of the North Downs was a much more open landscape maintained through traditional land management practices including grazing and coppicing of woodlands. The loss of grazing has led to an increase in secondary scrub woodland and has eroded the amenity and biodiversity value of the Surrey Hills, particularly the downs of Albury, Pewley, Merrow and Hackhurst.

## **LANDSCAPE RESTORATION AND ENHANCEMENT PROPOSALS**

- 4 Proposals are being progressed to integrate the management of this area of the North Downs with the respective landowners and land managers. As individual owners will find it difficult to secure significant agri-environment funds, a more strategic approach is recommended to ensure that funds can be secured through the Government’s new Higher Level Environmental Stewardship Scheme, which has the following objectives:
  - Wildlife conservation
  - Landscape quality and character
  - Natural resource protection
  - Protection of the historic environment
  - Promotion of public access and understanding of the countryside.

- 5 The proposal for environmental stewardship would involve the re-introduction of grazing across the area to maintain and enhance the SSSI chalk downland, prevent scrub encroachment and enhance the public's understanding and enjoyment of the area through coordinated visitor management. As the area lies adjacent to Guilford, an objective is to encourage safe, convenient and easy access to this high quality landscape for non-motorised traffic. The hub of the area however is Newlands Corner (see **FIGURE 2**, attached), which consists of 260 acres of registered common land owned by the Albury Estate and open to the public under an access agreement with Surrey County Council. The site is managed by Surrey Wildlife Trust on behalf of Surrey County Council and receives an estimated 300,000 – 400,000 visitors every year. The A25 runs through the area and the high traffic flows mean that visitors are discouraged from accessing the eastern part of the common which is crossed by the North Downs Way National Trail.
- 6 Improvements taking place at Newlands Corner include the development of the new snack bar and visitor centre (due to open this summer), improvements to the car park and some limited opening up of views by removing scrub on St Martha's Hill, under the Surrey Hills Inspiring Views project. The wider objectives for the Newlands Corner area are:
- An open downland landscape of high ecological value which is maintained through traditional extensive grazing
  - A high quality environment for visitors and local people to enjoy the dramatic views, wildlife and grazing, with a minimal impact on the local environment.
  - A gateway for local people and visitors to access the surrounding countryside, including the North Downs Way National Trail, St Martha's and Silent Pool.
  - Traffic calmed on the A25 to facilitate extensive grazing and a safer crossing of the North Downs Way National Trail by walkers, cyclists, horse riders and disabled users.

## A25 PROPOSALS

- 7 Integral to achieving the vision for the area are traffic management measures to facilitate safe grazing and to enhance access for all users of the North Downs Way National Trail. It is recognized by all parties that there are no easy or quick solutions, but the designations of AONB and SSSI means that all landowners and public bodies have a statutory duty to consider how the constraint of the A25 can be addressed.
- 8 Although no formal proposals exist, there have been suggestions to reduce the speed of traffic on the A25 and to introduce cattle grids with appropriate warning signs. There have also been suggestions, perhaps as an interim measure, to stock fence adjacent to the A25 in order to facilitate controlled crossing of the National Trail for recreational users with perhaps extending crossing time for shepherded livestock. It is worth noting that such open grazing regimes have proved successful in other parts of the country in traffic calming and facilitating grazing where there is a 40 mph speed limit.

## **VIEWS OF THE TRANSPORTATION SERVICE**

- 9 The A25 is a Principal Road linking Guildford with Dorking and Reigate and continuing to the Kent boundary and beyond. The section in question is heavily trafficked, on a downhill gradient (travelling eastbound) and the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speeds are approaching 50 mph. It carries HGVs to and from the Albury landfill site. The junction with the A248 Sherborne has a poor accident record and is the subject of an improvement scheme which is funded and will be carried out this year.

### **Legislation and precedents elsewhere**

- 10 There appear to be no national standards which prohibit the use of cattle grids on 'A' roads. That said, the only examples officers have been able to discover in mainland Britain are in Dartmoor and Exmoor. In the New Forest, all 'A' roads are fenced off. Where the cattle grids have proved effective (e.g. in the Chilterns, New Forest and Ashdown Forest) they have been installed on 'B' or 'C' roads which are subject to 40mph limits.

### **Safety Considerations**

- 11 The immediate concern is the risk of fast-moving vehicles being in collision with cattle. In Dartmoor there have been significant animal incidents which has led to calls from highway authorities and the Police to fence off the highway. In other areas, cattle wear reflective collars to enhance their visibility, particularly at night. There are likely to be issues regarding skid resistance for all vehicles, especially cyclists and motorcyclists, no matter what the signed speed limit. It is questionable whether safety audit would support these proposals.

### **Maintenance Issues**

- 12 In maintenance terms, officers have grave concerns about the installation of cattle grids on this standard of road. There will be potential additional costs of drainage, signing, cleansing, renewal, replacement, general maintenance and utilities' equipment.

### **Noise**

- 13 Serious consideration would also have to be given to possible noise implications. Internet research has revealed articles showing that noise from cattle grids has caused problems before, particularly at night. The case in question was on an 'A' road on Stornaway, where traffic levels and population are presumably rather lower than on the A25. It is possible that in still conditions noise would travel as far as local villages.
- 14 If the proposals were feasible, appropriate advanced warning measures will be required on the approaches to the grids. One possibility would be to impose a speed limit between the two cattle grids with appropriate gateway treatments and possibly reinforcement measures within the fenced area. Officers are aware of no precedent for this, so it would be outside current national or SCC policy. Given the constant pressure to reduce speed limits in residential areas, this may be difficult to justify.

**CONSULTATIONS**

- 15 All landowners and land managers have been engaged in discussion of restoring and enhancing the landscape. This includes Surrey Wildlife Trust, The Albury Estate, Surrey County Council, Guildford Borough Council and the National Trust. There has also been discussion with DEFRA's Rural Development Service, which administers the Environmental Stewardship Scheme, about funding for a landscape scale project.
- 16 The proposals were mentioned informally at the most recent meeting of the Transportation Task Group, since the group was considering other highway schemes including a pedestrian crossing facility at Newlands Corner. The Task Group was not convinced that the cattle grid proposals were workable.
- 17 The proposals would need to be advertised and any objections received overcome. Failing this the final decision may lie with the Secretary of State who could order a Public Inquiry. This could prove costly.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 18 A project of this size has the ability to attract significant external funding. This includes capital and revenue payments through the Environmental Stewardship Scheme, which could pay for measures like scrub removal, grazing and fencing.
- 19 A scheme to provide a crossing facility is currently included in the Committee's forward programme of minor highway improvements. This programme is under review by the Transportation Task Group, and it is therefore not possible to say whether or when it will be funded. It may be possible and advantageous to combine any such scheme with traffic management measures proposed and funded by the Surrey Hills Partnership.

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS**

- 20 This project is essential in securing external funding to meeting our duties and responsibilities in protecting and enhancing this nationally important environmental resource. A fragmented approach will lead to the continued encroachment of scrub and loss of the amenity and nature conservation value of the area.

**CONCLUSION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 21 The area to the east of Guildford is one of the most outstanding landscapes in the Surrey Hills AONB and a coordinated approach to its management is required to facilitate enhanced land management through grazing and the safe use of the North Downs Way National Trail. The A25 at Newlands Corner is a major constraint to achieving these wider objectives.
- 22 Nevertheless the proposed traffic management measures would be controversial and raise important issues of safety, maintenance and noise. The Committee is therefore asked to consider whether or not these proposals are feasible, and if so for comments on the types of measure which might be considered appropriate.

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**BACKGROUND PAPERS:** None

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FIGURE 1: THE NORTH DOWNS LANDSCAPE ENHANCEMENT TARGET AREA

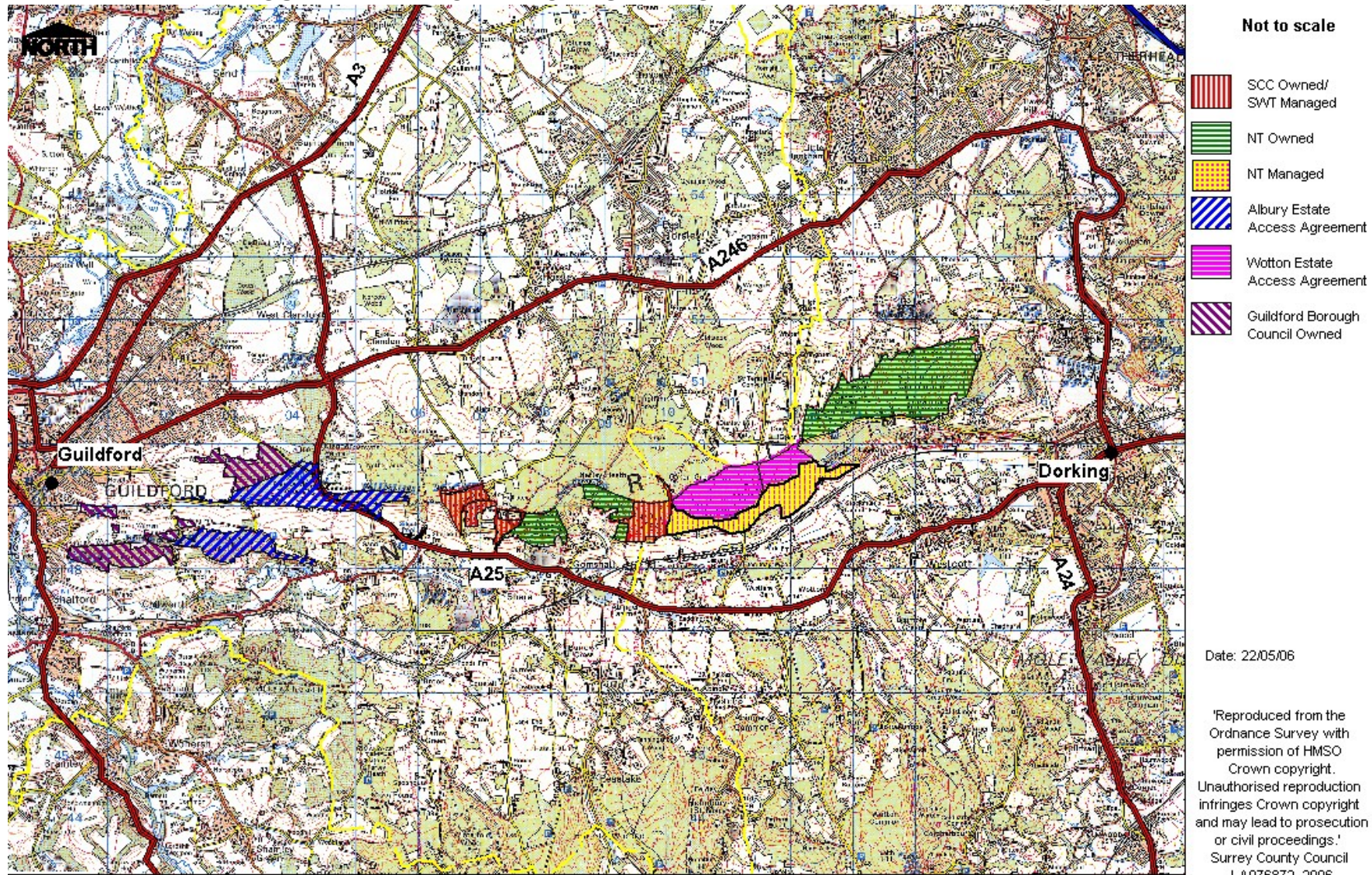
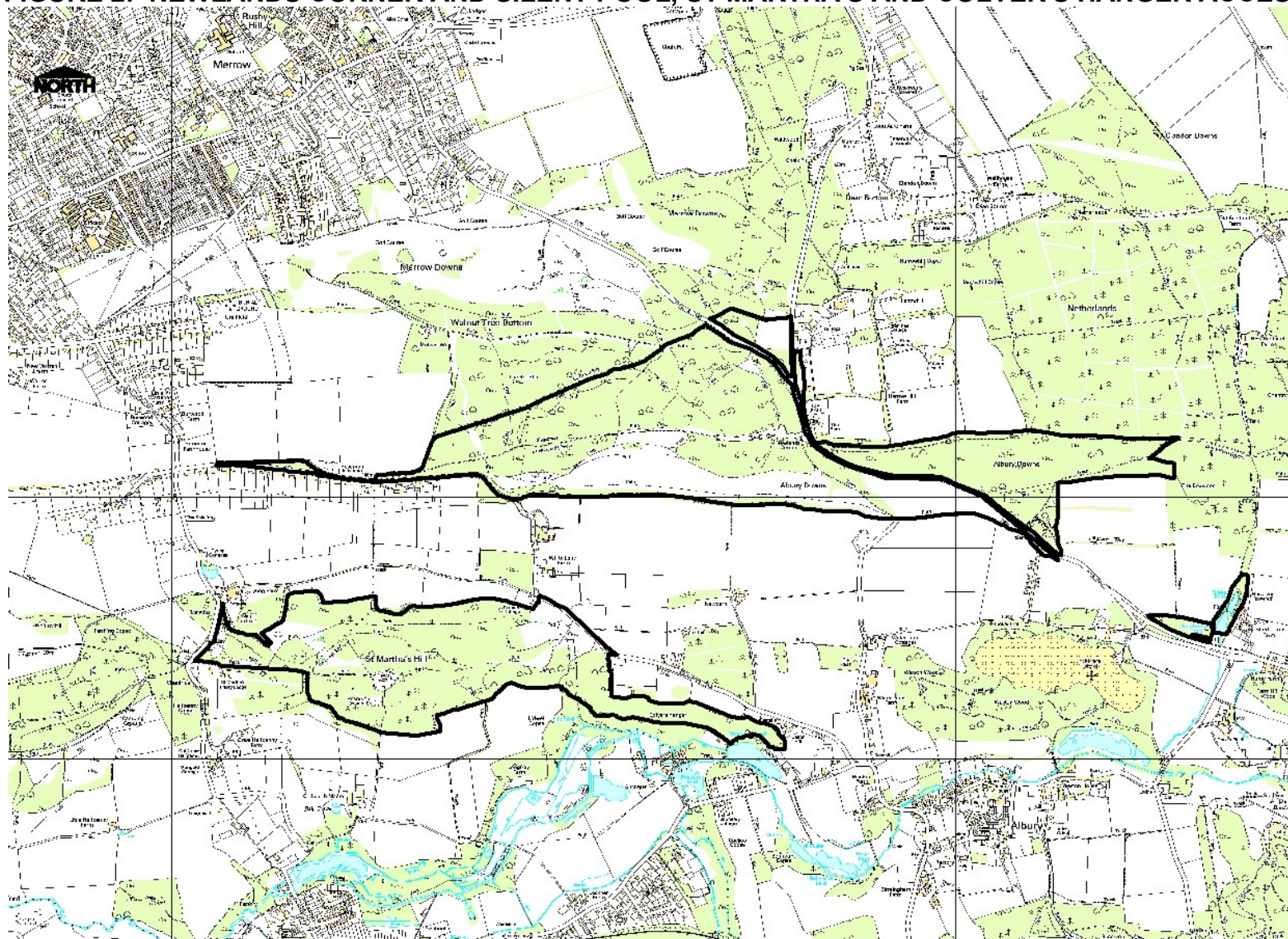




FIGURE 2: NEWLANDS CORNER AND SILENT POOL, ST MARTHA'S AND COLYER'S HANGER ACCESS AGREEMENT AREA



Scale 1:15000

Key

— Access Agreement Boundary

Plan No NC1

Prepared by SJ Chimbwandra  
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Surrey County Council