

ANNEX 1

Surrey County Council Land Management Policy (January 2025)

Why do we need to consider our approach to land management?

Surrey is well known for its green and leafy landscape. For many, it is what makes Surrey such an attractive place to live, work and play. The countryside and water bodies provide a range of opportunities and benefits such as recreation and wellbeing; livelihoods and food; wildlife and environmental processes; an aesthetic landscape and raw materials; and community cohesion.

However, Surrey's natural environment is facing unprecedented challenges owing to climate change, biodiversity loss and increasing demands upon its use. As a significant owner and manager of land, Surrey County Council has a duty to ensure that its land is used appropriately to support delivery of the Council's roles and corporate outcomes. Through effective management it will be more resistant to climate change and environmental pressures.

A framework for managing land has been constructed to allow the Council to agree a vision and set of principles and policies, to make evidence-based decisions, manage risks and realise opportunities.

What is Surrey County Council's Role?

Surrey County Council owns or manages 2% of the land in Surrey. It is committed to managing its land in a way that maximises its ecological, educational, social and economic value. By using the land management framework, principles and policies, Surrey County Council will make good decisions on land use, in line with its duties to have regard for areas designated for nature and landscape and to provide leadership on areas for local biodiversity improvement. In leading by example, the Council can inspire other landowners and stakeholders to adopt and deliver similar approaches to how they manage their land.

The Draft Land Management Policy- Vision, Principles and Policies

A Vision, three Land Management Principles and ten guiding Land Management Policies are set out below. Together, they consider all outcomes from possible land uses which support the Council's Surrey Way and ensure no one is left behind in decision making. Developed in conjunction with departments from across the Council, they enable consideration of service delivery and positive outcomes for Surrey residents whilst ensuring land is managed sustainably for nature and for future generations to enjoy.

Draft Vision

*“by 2050, Surrey's land-based estate will be **thriving**. The Council's ambition is to act more dynamically to ensure the future sustainability of our land-based assets, both financial and environmental, through embedding nature-based solutions, community action and new technology into our land management and decision-making.*

Our land will be more resilient to economic and environmental shocks and climate change, support growing biodiversity and have strong local community engagement and ownership. The Land Management Policy is a decision-making tool which will guide us in determining the best use of land in the right locations”

Principles

The key Principles are to:

1. Harness the natural environment to deliver wider outcomes: The Council recognises the wider value of the land it owns and will maximise the services it can provide for all of Surrey
2. Lead by example: The Council will work towards becoming an exemplar landowner, positively managing its land to achieve the best outcomes for its tenant farmers and rural businesses as well as the environment.
3. Deliver responsible and effective management: The Council is committed to putting in place management practices and monitoring those to ensure the successful delivery of the Policy

Policies

Policy 1: Protecting Nature: We will enhance biodiversity by protecting natural habitats and creating connections between them that benefits residents, farmers and rural business

Biodiversity is essential for maintaining a healthy natural environment and a viable farming community and the Council will support a range of projects to protect and enhance biodiversity

- **Goal:** To protect and enhance biodiversity, increase habitat quality and connectivity for wildlife.
- **Actions:** Implement projects that support nature's recovery, such as creating wildlife corridors and restoring degraded habitats.
- **Outcomes:** Improved habitats and increased species diversity, contributing to healthier ecosystems.

Policy 2: Health and Wellbeing: Open spaces will be accessible to all, promoting physical and mental health.

The Council will promote access to green spaces by improving countryside sites, Public Rights of Way and recreational areas. The Council will work with partners and stakeholders to improve access for all, offering volunteering opportunities and initiatives such as 'green prescribing', where residents are encouraged to spend time in nature to improve their health and well-being.

- **Goal:** To promote access to nature for physical and mental health benefits.
- **Actions:** Develop and maintain green spaces, encourage outdoor activities, and support initiatives such as volunteering and green prescribing.
- **Outcomes:** Enhanced community health with better access to nature and recreational opportunities.

Policy 3: Education and Employment. We will use our land to provide learning opportunities and to support local employment.

Creating education, training and employment opportunities are key elements of the Council's approach to sustainable land management. The Council's land includes many buildings which could be suitable for small businesses, studios or workshops to help diversify the rural economy.

- **Goal:** To develop opportunities for learning, training and jobs related to the environment and rural economy
- **Actions:** Support outdoor learning, create green job opportunities, and promote environmental education in schools and communities.
- **Outcomes:** Increased educational, training and employment opportunities, leading to a growing, skilled workforce in environmental sectors.

Policy 4: Income Generation: We will support our farmers and rural businesses and work with them to explore ways to generate suitable income streams from our land

Sustainable income generation is an important element of the Council’s approach to the long-term viability of land management.

- **Goal:** Support sustainable income through farm diversification, related businesses and other means.
- **Actions:** Support local food production and develop new income streams
- **Outcomes:** Sustainable income sources that support local economies and enhance the viability of rural areas.

Policy 5: Sustainable Farming: We will support farmers and drive farming practices that improve soil health, produce local food, and contribute to the environment.

The Council will promote sustainable farming activities such as diverse crop rotations, minimising the use of pesticides, and protecting the soil. These practices are often referred to as regenerative principles. These can contribute to improving the soil and enhancing the economic and environmental resilience of farming and the countryside.

- **Goal:** Implement practices that improve soil health and support local food production.
- **Actions:** Promote sustainable farming techniques, enhance soil quality, and support sustainable/regenerative agriculture that increases biodiversity and climate resilience.
- **Outcomes:** Healthier soils, agriculture balanced with nature, and enhanced ecosystem services.

Policy 6: Circular Economy: Our approach to land management will include sustainable practices that reduce waste and promote recycling.

The Council will promote the use practices that reduce waste, and support the circular economy to include recycling programmes, composting, and using sustainable materials in construction and maintenance.

- **Goal:** To embed sustainability and circular economy principles in land management.
- **Actions:** Reduce waste, promote recycling, and use resources sustainably. Encourage the use of appropriate renewable energy such as roof top solar and sustainable materials in all projects.
- **Outcomes:** Reduced environmental footprint and more efficient use of resources, contributing to long-term sustainability.

Policy 7: Build Resilience: We will build resilience to climate change impacts, invasive species, and diseases.

Climate resilience is essential for protecting the environment and communities from the impacts of climate change. The Council will implement projects that enhance the resilience of natural systems, such as planting climate-resilient species and restoring wetlands to absorb floodwaters.

- **Goal:** To build resilience to climate change impacts like droughts, floods, fires, invasive species, and diseases.
- **Actions:** Implement climate adaptation projects, monitor and manage invasive species, and enhance nature's resilience through diverse planting and habitat management.
- **Outcomes:** Increased resilience to climate change, protecting the natural environment and humans from adverse impacts.

Policy 8: Water Management. We will prioritize land management activities which improve water quality and reduce the risk of floods and droughts.

The Council will use nature-based solutions such as wetland creation, river restoration and sustainable drainage to manage flood risk and improve water quality. The Council will work closely with partners to improve natural water storage and reduce water consumption. We will work proactively with them to tackle pollution and ensure through supporting those that have powers and lobbying Government those responsible are held to account

- **Goal:** To use nature-based solutions to improve water quality, tackle pollution and manage flood risks.
- **Actions:** Develop natural flood management projects, improve local stormwater storage, and enhance water quality through sustainable drainage systems and wetland restoration. Work with key stakeholders to reduce pollution.
- **Outcomes:** Better water quality, reduced flood risks, and improved resilience to droughts.

Policy 9: Net Zero Carbon: We support activities that contribute to achieving net-zero carbon emissions.

The Council will implement projects that can reduce or capture carbon emissions, such as tree planting, improving soil management, increasing energy-efficiency and renewable energy generation on our operational buildings where appropriate

- **Goal:** To support activities that contribute to net-zero carbon emissions.
- **Actions:** Implement projects which sequester carbon, such as promoting appropriate renewable energy on buildings, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions through sustainable land management practices.
- **Outcomes:** Progress towards lower greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to global climate goals and improved environmental management.

Policy 10: Community Engagement: We will create opportunities for the community to engage with and volunteer in the natural environment.

The Council will support community projects and encourage volunteering to foster a sense of ownership and stewardship of natural areas. The Council will work to promote inclusive access to nature for all.

- **Goal:** To foster community inclusion, volunteering, and engagement with nature.
- **Actions:** Support community projects, encourage volunteering, and ensure inclusive public access to green spaces.
- **Outcomes:** Stronger communities, increased volunteering, greater public appreciation and awareness of local nature.

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