

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET****DATE: 27 OCTOBER 2015****REPORT OF: MR MIKE GOODMAN, CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING****LEAD OFFICER: TREVOR PUGH, STRATEGIC DIRECTOR FOR ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE****SUBJECT: INVESTMENT IN IMPROVEMENTS TO THE VISITOR FACILITIES AT NEWLANDS CORNER.****SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

Newlands Corner is situated on the North Downs beside the A25 within the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It forms part of the Albury Estate owned by the Duke of Northumberland and is managed under an Access Agreement with Surrey County Council (SCC). The Access Agreement gives the public access to the Albury Downs, Silent Pool and St Martha's Hill, as well as providing the facilities located at Newlands Corner. Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) manage the site on SCC's behalf.

The Newlands Corner site currently has a small catering outlet with no undercover seating, toilets, a small visitor room and a large car park. It is popular with visitors, attracting over 550,000 visits per annum, to admire the views, use the facilities and walk dogs. In addition, the site is well used by cyclists using on and off road routes. The current facilities are modest and in need of repair and improvement.

With investment there is the potential to attract a greater number of visitors, to improve their experience and to encourage more healthy activity. It is proposed to create a signed Family Play Trail, including play structures and to improve the toilet facilities and car parking arrangements. These proposals form Phase 1 of a potential wider package that would include a new cafe, further Trails and other facilities. The Phase 1 proposals have a capital cost of £0.4m and would be supported financially by the re-commencement of car parking charges to generate an income stream.

Cabinet are also asked to delegate responsibility for making the necessary changes to the agreements with the Albury Estate and Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) to support these improvements.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Approves the proposed investment of £0.4m to improve facilities at Newlands Corner, including a Family Play Trail.
2. Approves the re-commencement of car park charging at Newlands Corner to help finance the improvements as set out at paragraph 16.
3. Delegates the agreement of the necessary changes to agreements with the Albury Estate and SWT to the Director of Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Assistant Director for Environment and the Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Two of the three Strategic Goals in the Corporate Strategy can be addressed through the proposals in this report: improving Residents' Experience and improving their Wellbeing.

In order to achieve this, decisions are needed about the investment required, the re-commencement of parking charges and changes to the agreements that exist with Albury Estate and Surrey Wildlife Trust.

DETAILS:

Background

1. Cabinet approved a report in June 2015, which set out the goal of making the SCC Countryside Estate self funding by 2021. SWT and SCC are now working on a business plan to achieve that target. Improving key visitor attractions like the Newlands Corner site is a key part of that Business Plan. The County Council's Countryside Estate comprises 6,206 acres (2,514 hectares) of land owned by the County Council, with a further 2,538 acres (1,028 hectares) managed under Access Agreements. The Access Agreement with the Albury Estate comprises some of the most iconic sites in the county, including Newlands Corner.
2. This site has been used for many decades as a tea stop, to look at the view and to access the downs and woodland around. It is also located within the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and on the North Downs Way.
3. Newlands Corner comprises a large car park, toilets, outdoor café and small visitor room, which have been developed on the site over a long period. The current facilities are not up to the standards of comparable countryside sites along the North Downs and tend to detract from the potential use of the site by a wider range of visitors, including families, and educational groups.
4. Surveys undertaken in the last few years have shown that the site attracts 550,000 visits per annum and an estimated 122,000 vehicles. Most people stay for less than an hour and don't move far from their vehicles.

Proposals

5. Working to a Landscape Master plan, the proposal is to invest in the site facilities to provide an improved visitor centre, café and toilets as well as retail and educational spaces. This will enable a vision of providing facilities that broaden the range of people who visit, encourage them to stay longer and become more engaged in activities on the site to learn and have fun with health benefits. The proposed improvements are in two phases which are set out below in paragraphs 7 and 8.
6. A project board has been established with representation from the Albury Estate, Guildford Borough Council, Surrey County Council and Surrey Wildlife Trust. Led by SCC the project board is working on a package to incrementally improve the facilities.
7. Phase 1 is to invest in a family play trail, improvements to the toilets, improvements to the cafe offer and re-commencing car parking charges. Visitors to the site currently only staying for less than one hour, with over half of those visitors stay for less than 30 minutes. Installing play trails at other countryside sites has proven to be a good way to attract families to the site and they are more likely to stay longer, particularly if the toilet and refreshment facilities are good. This will therefore also attract more business to the café. The aim is to have the family play trail installed by April 2016 to coincide with the re-commencement of car parking charges.
8. Phase 2 will involve the redesign of the visitor facilities on the site including a new visitor building, comprising a cafe with undercover seating and a terrace, new toilets and providing retail and educational space. Phase 2 will be subject to a separate business case and Cabinet report.
9. The income generated by charging for car parking is estimated to be able to cover the costs of the upfront investment and the costs of managing and maintaining the improved site.

CONSULTATION

10. The Project Board includes representatives from the Albury Estate, Guildford BC, SWT and SCC.
11. Two Stakeholder meetings have been held with the wider representative group from the above plus users groups and local members from the County, Borough and Parish councils. Separate briefing sessions have also been held with the local councillors.
12. Separate briefing sessions were held with local Borough Councillors, the local County Councillor and the Parish Councils.
13. A communications plan has been drawn up to ensure that all the stakeholders are aware of the plans and have an opportunity to comment. A formal consultation is not required but the Project team are ensuring that stakeholders understand the reasons for the re-commencement of car parking charges. A programme of proactive communications will start in early January 2016 on site and on the websites. Initial briefing sessions with local Members and Parishes are already underway.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:
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14. The play trail will require planning consent for some of the features and both the trail and parking infrastructure will require Commons Consent. Contact has been made with the relevant bodies to seek advice and start the process but applications cannot be

made until the design for the trails has been agreed. Draft Designs are due in November 2015. Annex 1 is the Milestones for Phase 1 of the Project and Annex 2 is the draft outline Master Plan for all of the improvements, a drawing of the proposed trails and illustrations of play structures in a similar existing facility.

Financial and Value for Money Implications

15. Cabinet are asked to approve the investment of £0.4m. A financial analysis has been completed which takes into account upfront investment costs, the projected income from charging for car parking and the costs of running and managing the site. The details of this are set out in the confidential Part 2 of this report. The detailed business case was reviewed by the Investment Panel in August.
16. The parking charges proposed are shown in the table below. These have been set taking into account the costs of managing the site and the Countryside Estate in general, as well as charges at similar sites run by the National Trust, the Forestry Commission and other local councils. SCC and SWT are also working together to agree the proposed charges for a season ticket for regular visitors to the site.

Newlands Parking Tariff Duration	Charge
0-60 minutes	£1.00
60-120 minutes	£2.00
120-180 minutes	£3.00
Over 180 minutes	£4.00

The extent to which the financial position will be impacted by lower increases in charges, visits, and the average length of stay has been considered. In all cases modelled, whilst the returns are reduced, there remains a net benefit to SCC taking into account contributions to existing Countryside management and overhead costs.

17. The current Access Agreement with the Albury Estate is being reviewed to ensure that it provides the ability to invest and receive returns as envisaged by this business case. The Albury Estate and SCC have agreed the principles of the revised agreement but are still negotiating the details for the final share of the car parking charges and any future income generated from Phase 2 of the Project.

Section 151 Officer Commentary

18. The £0.4m capital requirement for Newlands Corner is included within the current Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) as presented to Cabinet in July 2015.
19. The proposals recommended for approval within this paper are projected to cover the annual costs of that investment and those of operating the improved facility.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer

21. Consent is required under section 38 of the Commons Act 2006 to the carrying out of the proposed works on the common land. An application for such consent needs to be made to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, via the Planning

Inspectorate. There is a requirement for the applicant (the Albury Estate) to carry out a comprehensive advertising and consultation exercise prior to making the application, in the interests of good communication and so as to identify any concerns and find solutions at an early stage. The Secretary of State, on considering the application, has power to call a public inquiry into the proposals if that is felt to be necessary. Legal Services are currently discussing a revised agreement with the Albury Estate in relation to car parking charges and improvements to facilities on the land.

22. The public sector equality duty (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) applies to the decision to be made by Cabinet in this report. There is a requirement when deciding upon the recommendations to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity for people with protected characteristics, foster good relations between such groups, and eliminate any unlawful discrimination, which includes considering any disproportionate impact on any particular protected group. These matters are dealt with in the equalities paragraphs of the report

Equalities and Diversity

23. An Equalities Impact Assessment is drafted and will be completed once the Trail has been designed. The trail is being designed with access for the majority of users in mind and will be suitable for all ages. Information on the project will be shared through the Disability Alliance Network Groups, but some considerations have already been made around disabled users. For example, as part of the Masterplanning, the current provision for disabled parking bays will remain the same or increase. Also, Blue Badge holders who display their badge, and the groups of disabled people, who visit the site will not be charged to park.
24. Also, the project is intended to encourage a greater number of a wider demographic of site users. It is therefore not thought that there would be a disproportionate impact on any one age group, but is hoped to encourage more people of all ages to use the site and enjoy the countryside. Either through play, for children, or walking for health, for older people, as encouraged by the NHS Live Well campaign.

Other Implications:

25. The potential implications for the following Council priority and policy areas have been considered. Where the impact is potentially significant a summary of the issues has been set out in detail below.

Area assessed:	Direct Implications:
Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children	No significant implications arising from this report
Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children and adults	No significant implications arising from this report
Public Health	The provision of the family play trail will encourage new visitors to the countryside and give them a greater incentive to explore further. The surfacing of the trail will also make it more accessible to a wider range of abilities.

Climate change	No significant implications arising from this report
Carbon emissions	No significant implications arising from this report

Public Health implications

26. It is the aim of both SCC and SWT that, by improving the visitor facilities and making sites more attractive to local users, the number of people who partake in regular physical activity will increase.

Climate change/carbon emissions implications

27. There are no significant implications for climate change or carbon emissions from this project. The plan requires the materials to be sourced locally where possible and virtually all the materials for the play trail are timber.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

Next Steps:

- Information for the public will be installed on-site at the visitor centre and on-line. The Play Trail designers will be engaging with the public to develop the trail and it's features.
- Planning and Commons Consent will be sought for the Family Play Trail once the design is completed.
- The Play Trail and car park charging infrastructure will be installed ready for a launch in Spring 2016.
- The Communications plan will commence to inform the public of the improvements and reasons behind the car park charging.

Contact Officer:

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Consulted:

The Albury Estate
Surrey Wildlife Trust
Guildford Borough Council
Local Borough and Parish Councillors

Annexes:

Annex 1: Project Milestones
Annex 2: Master Plan and drawings

Sources/background papers:

Cabinet Report of 23 June 2015 :The Agreement with Surrey Wildlife Trust for the Management of the County Council's Countryside Estate

Annex 1

Project Milestones	Month / Year
Play designer appointed to start work on design of play trail.	July 2015
Process for Commons Act consent started (cannot be finalised until design confirmed).	August 2015
SCC agrees financial model and Heads of Terms with the Albury Estate.	Sept 2015
SCC agrees financial model with SWT.	Sept 2015
SCC and SWT work together to refine and submit the business case to SCC Cabinet.	Sept 2015
Delivery/implementation plan for the project agreed with the Project Board.	Sept 2015
SCC, SWT and Albury Estate agree and implement a Communications Plan (focusing on PR for Car Park Charges and improvements of the visitor facilities).	Sept 2015
Funding secured for Phase 1 of the project in line with the agreed financial model.	Oct 2015
Provide indicative unit price costs to build and install Vehicle Charging Infrastructure.	Oct 2015
Architect appointed to start work on design of visitor building.	Oct 2015
Agree design of All Ability Family Play Trail with Project Board.	Nov 2015
Agree design of Building and Direct Surrounds (RIBA Stage 3 'Developed Design') with Project Board and provide indicative unit price costs.	Nov 2015
Provide indicative unit price costs for landscape works shown in Landscape Masterplan (excluding Building and Direct Surrounds).	Nov 2015
Submit planning application.	Nov/Dec 2015
Provide indicative unit price costs to build, install and inspect new All Ability Family Play Trail.	Nov/Dec 2015
Secure planning permission and any other permissions needed (including Commons Act Consent) to carry out Phase 1.	Jan 2016
Procure and start the build and installation of the All Ability Family Play Trail.	Jan 2016
Design and procure the signage for the Vehicle Charging Infrastructure.	Dec 2015
Procure the Vehicle Charging Infrastructure and associated Support Services.	Jan/Feb 2016

Install the Vehicle Charging Infrastructure.	Mar 2016
Completion Date for Phase 1 of the project (open the All Ability Family Play Trail and operate the new Vehicle Charging Scheme).	Spring 2016