

CABINET

Tuesday 2 February 2016

RESPONSE TO PETITION

The Petition

It states: “**Keep Newlands Corner family-friendly and free to access!**”

Surrey County Council has agreed Phase 1 of a development at Newlands Corner - to impose parking charges of £1 an hour (maximum £4) - and to spend £400,000 on constructing a family play trail and improving the existing toilets. Phase 2 envisages a coach park and large new café (built across the current viewing area, including the grass, on the brow of the hill) together with a new visitor centre and shopping space.

Please sign this petition if you want to keep Newlands Corner (the greatest viewpoint anywhere in the south of England, boasts this proud Surreyite!) free to access for all, unpretentious and busy! There's a whole community up there, consisting of the burger bar staff, SWT rangers and a crowd of regulars - bikers, police, fire and ambulance services, classic car owners, walkers, horse-riders and those who just go for the food, drink and friendly chat. SCC's move to monetise the site risks destroying this highly successful local amenity and destroying the livelihood of the people who run the busy burger bar. This is utterly unacceptable!”

Submitted by Richard Harrold

Signatures: 7,545

The Council's response aims to address the two key issues raised in the petition:

1. New facilities that will obstruct the view over the sight.
2. Proposed vehicle charges

Response

Thank you for this petition and giving me an opportunity to respond to you and correct some of the misunderstandings. I note with thanks that the background to the petition has been amended since it was first set up last year. I have spoken to the original petitioner on the phone, at this time I was able to inform him of the process and confirm what was actually happening I have offered to meet him and for him to be part of the consultation. Unfortunately despite trying to arrange a meeting on a number of occasions this offer has not been taken up.

The Newlands Corner Project started with the creation of a Board and two stakeholder engagement sessions, held last August and September, to look at very early ideas for the layout of the site. The stakeholder sessions included; SWT, County, Borough and Parish Councillors, representatives from the Surrey Hills AONB Board, and user groups such as the walkers, and riders. This helped the Board to shape the project.

I am now pleased to announce that we are holding a drop in session for all those interested in the Project on 9th February from 3pm to 7pm at Albury Parish Hall. Representatives from the Surrey Wildlife Trust, Surrey County Council and the Albury Estate will be present to discuss the phase one of the project and collect residents views and comments. The Play Trail Designers will also be available to discuss their draft designs. This is the start of a public engagement process that will last until 8 March 2016.

1) New facilities that will obstruct the view over the site.

Newlands Corner is a popular site for walking, cycling, riding, enjoying the view and just stopping for a refreshment break. This was recognised many years ago when the County Council negotiated an Access Agreement with the Albury Estate who own the land. Under that Agreement and a series of leases the County Council then constructed the car park, toilets and visitor room to provide facilities for the public. We therefore concur with the petitioners' statement about the value and beauty of the site.

Surrey Wildlife Trust took over management of the Access Agreement on our behalf in 2002. Over the years the number of visitors has grown to over 500,000 per year with around 122,000 cars using the car park. In that time the costs of running the site have also increased and the need to provide better facilities has grown. In conjunction with this there is an opportunity to encourage a wider range of people of all ages and abilities to use the site, by providing carefully designed and sited facilities. The Play Trail is being specifically designed to provide a range of stimuli including sensory as well as visual and the opportunity to climb and swing. Children, groups with disability, adults and groups representing people with dementia are being consulted to ensure we get the play trail right. Phase 1 is about the residents experience and their health and well being by encouraging a wider group to enjoy our wonderful countryside.

To this end a two phase project has been commenced to provide better on-site facilities and to help generate an income to manage the site and potentially the wider countryside estate.

The business plan for Phase 1 of the project was approved by Surrey County Council's Cabinet last November. They agreed to invest £400,000 into the project which will be repaid by the income generated and then allow the net income to be used to improve the management of the site. The elements of Phase 1 are to improve the existing toilets, and cafe and install the family play trail. The trail is designed to appeal to a range of ages and abilities and includes large wooden pieces that can be climbed and swung from as well as areas that can be accessed by wheelchairs and buggies. It is designed to stimulate the senses and attract the curious. The trail will be educational and we believe this will attract schools that will be able to use the pieces to help educate our children. The designers have established a website to allow the public to look at the proposals and to feedback any comments on them. <http://www.davieswhite.co.uk/newlandscorner/>

This trail will be sited in the woodland so it is not intrusive in the landscape and will encourage a wider range of people to venture from their cars and into the woods.

Phase 2 is a proposal to construct a new centre to include the cafe, with a sit down area as well as facilities to allow refreshments to be purchased from outside, a small space to promote and sell local produce, new toilets and a flexible space for exhibitions and

educational groups, and other visitor use. A firm of architects are currently looking at producing some sketch designs for a range of locations on the site to be exhibited for public feedback at the end of May. Any new building will fit into the landscape and not be at the front of the site and block the wonderful views. There has been no final decision on the design or location. We are very aware of the location of the site in the Surrey Hills, the importance of the ancient yew trees and other biodiversity as well as the inherent value of the site for open air recreation.

Phase 2 will be dependent on gaining the required permissions and on getting funding. The business case is still to be finalised.

2) Proposed vehicle charges

Following the installation of the Play Trail and improvements to the toilets and Cafe, vehicle charging will recommence. The charges have been set at a level that compares favourably with charges at comparable sites. We believe this will offer good value. The charges planned are £1 per hour up to a max of £4 for the day. A 20 minute free period is proposed to allow people who just want to use the toilets or cafe to do so without having to pay, this should also benefit the cafe owner. In addition there will be an option to purchase a season ticket. The income from charging will fund the ongoing maintenance and other management costs for the site. It will also be able to fund some of the additional work the Albury Estate wishes to see including improvement to paths, where the surface has become eroded.

The Newlands Corner Project is providing an opportunity to work together with the landowner and other partners to improve visitor facilities as part of a business plan that will help to provide an income to manage the countryside and ultimately to give the countryside the security of funding that it requires to continue to give the public opportunities to enjoy it. This project will benefit our residents of all ages and abilities, providing an opportunity to encourage exploration and learning in the countryside.

Mr Mike Goodman

Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning

2 February 2016

Newlandscornerproject@surreycc.gov.uk

Original wording on the petition as repeated in the Guildford Dragon.

“Surrey County Council has voted to impose parking charges at Newlands Corner, with even those there just for a quick cup of tea being forced to cough up. Meanwhile, the visitor centre and burger bar is to be replaced with a new visitor centre and café, at a cost of £400,000 – and it seems likely (though this is not publicly confirmed, yet!) that the family who run the burger bar, will be slung out to make way for a commercial concern.

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