

Public Questions

Question (1) from Julie Brown:

The following points have been raised by Julie Brown:

- Certain animals are 'protected under the wildlife and countryside act 1981'. Have there been any surveys done that show that there will be no adverse effect on protected species and have SCC obtained a licence from Natural England to disturb protected animals that live at Newlands?
- Newlands is an 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty'. Has Natural England been informed of the proposals and if so, what are their views?
- Regarding the Cabinet Meeting on 27th October, paragraph 17; What are the details of the 'revised access agreement' between The Albury Estate and SCC and have the details of the 'share of car parking charges and any future income generated from phase 2 of the proposals' been finalised, and if so what are they?
- What is the estimated capital investment of phase II?
- Has The Albury Estate or SCC put in a planning application to the Planning Inspectorate for consent to carry out works on common land. If so when was this done?
- Can a public meeting be held?

Reply:

There has been an ecological survey, which is being released under Freedom of Information. Officers working on the project have been engaging with their colleagues from Countryside Management & Biodiversity as well as the Ecology Team at the Wildlife Trust to ensure all relevant legislation is adhered to. Further surveys of the site will be taking place, as per recommendations from these discussions.

Natural England are aware of the proposal and we have engaged the AONB Board, where Natural England have a representative, as well as other key stakeholders like the CPRE. Natural England will be formally consulted when applying for commons consent.

These details have not been finalised as they are still under negotiation.

The work for Phase 2 is at an early stage and further work is required before any estimate of capital investment can be made.

The application for Commons Consent has not been submitted as yet. We are waiting for the public engagement exercise to feed into the application.

A drop in session for the public is being held on 9 February 2016 from 15.00 to 19.00 at Albury Parish Hall. There will be an opportunity to speak to members of the Project Team and the Play Tail Designers.

Mr Mike Goodman
Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning
2 February 2016

Question (2) from Allen Johnson:

The following points have been raised by Allan Johnson:

- Where can one get sight of the business plan that describes and cost justifies the proposed changes?
- Upon the results of what research are the proposed changes based? Who did the research and where are the results lodged for public access?
- Why can the existing infrastructure not be modified and thereby saving on the destruction and subsequent construction of that which will be destroyed?
- What are the revenue projections from the business case and who are the parties that will have direct and indirect interests?
- How will the revenues be apportioned?
- How regularly will proposed costs and charges be reviewed and increased?
- What are the impacts on flora and fauna?
- What are the impacts and conditions of Drove Road being lost as a road and what are the contributions from SCC Highways and Transport Services in this respect?
- Why not improve the toilet facilities and leave everything else as it is?

Reply:

The business plan was classed as confidential and taken to Cabinet as a Part 2 item to the 27 October 2015. The business plan went through all necessary challenge and approval processes, including the councils Investment Panel, before being presented to Cabinet.

There were surveys undertaken by the Surrey Wildlife Trust that covered Newlands Corner and Ockham. The information was not published but was shared with the Ockham Liaison Group, who requested a report.

This information is being provided under Freedom of Information.

We are looking at all the options to improve the visitor facilities and there is potential to explore this as an option for Phase 2.

As stated in a response to a previous question, the business case is confidential. The parties with interest are the County Council, the Surrey Wildlife Trust and the Albury Estate, as the land owner.

As stated previously, this is still under negotiation.

It has been proposed that costs and charges will be reviewed annually.

A number of surveys have already been carried out and the advice of Surrey Wildlife Trust experts and the County Council's in house ecologist has been sought to ensure that we are aware of any potential impacts.

There is no potential for Drove Road to be lost as part of this project. The Drove Road is classified as a Public Bridleway and therefore by protected by law. The Countryside Access Team, who look after the Rights of Way network have been consulted and involved in the project.

One of the most important goals of this project is to encourage more people into the countryside, especially those who may have never visited the countryside before or not done so for some time. The toilets are part of the whole project when people visit the countryside and the play trails they expect quality facilities.

Mr Mike Goodman
Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning
2 February 2016

Question (3) from Susan Darling:

There has been confusion about how income from any parking charges at Newlands Corner would be used. If parking charges are imposed, what approximate amounts or proportion of the income are planned to go: a) to investment in a Play Trail, in improvements to the toilets/cafe offer and in parking charge infrastructure b) to servicing the parking regime - wardens, ticket machines, etc, c) to pursuing penalties and legal action on overstayers, d) to maintenance of the Newlands site e) to maintenance of other parts of the SCC countryside estate f) to upfront investment on Phase 2 of the Newlands development plan, and g) to net benefit to SCC.

Reply:

The details of the Business Plan are confidential as outlined above. However I can answer some of your questions. The net revenue from the parking charges will fund the maintenance of Newlands Corner, including repairing signs and picnic tables, keeping paths clear, removing litter, paying for utilities, repairing paths and the car park surface, a warden for the site and running the toilets and visitors centre. If there is additional revenue generated then it will go to fund other countryside sites. An assessment at that time will be on whether this is done on a proportionate basis or because of a requirement for specific investment. There will be no revenue contribution from parking to Phase 2, as that would be a separate capital investment.

What I do want to make clear is that this project is about getting benefits to a whole variety of people from being in, learning about and enjoying the countryside. It is hoped that there will be the direct benefit to SCC by helping to make the countryside self sustaining and thereby making a saving, but there are more broad benefits around health and wellbeing that also need to be considered and not just focusing on pure financials.

Mr Mike Goodman
Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning
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 9 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

CABINET RESPONSE TO ECONOMIC PROSPERITY, ENVIRONMENT AND HIGHWAYS BOARD

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT MEMBER REFERENCE GROUP'S REPORT ON THE KIER CONTRACT EXTENSION

(considered by Economic Prosperity, Environment and Highways Board on 10 December 2015)

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Cabinet approve the extension to the Kier contract until 2021, subject to the conditions outlined in paragraph 20 of the Member Reference Group report.

These conditions were:

In order to ensure that Kier continue to progress the improvements/issues identified, it would like the following conditions included in the contract extension agreement:

- Delivery of a new joint procurement strategy which addresses the sub contractor performance management issues and actively supports local businesses.
- Implementation of a new performance framework for Kier and its supply chain which incentivises good performance and consequences for poor performance.
- An efficiency action plan which looks at integration opportunities to reduce duplication of effort and waste in teams.
- A firm commitment from Kier to support our Customer Service Excellence ongoing accreditation requirements, which includes a review of customer defect reporting and programme management processes and an improved website.
- A new Communications and Engagement Strategy which should be embedded into all future schemes and is linked to the contract performance framework to ensure compliance.

RESPONSE:

I would like to thank the Board for their comments and scrutiny of the report, including the officer presentation in Part 2 of the meeting, and for commending the recommendation to Cabinet. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Member Reference Group once again for their thorough review of the Kier contract. Their findings have been instrumental in shaping the terms of the contract extension, which will ultimately deliver greater strategic alignment, value for money and improved services for residents. Surrey and Kier officers are working together to develop plans to ensure the contract conditions required by the Member Reference Group are successfully implemented. These conditions and associated contract modifications will be enshrined in a contract extension agreement and will be signed by the end of June 2016, subject to Cabinet approval on the 2 February. In line with the recommendations made in their report I will now be asking the Member Reference Group to review their terms of reference to consider their ongoing role in the contract and the service's wider long term strategic plans.

John Furey
Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Flooding
2 February 2016

CABINET RESPONSE TO COUNCIL OVERVIEW BOARD

ORBIS PUBLIC LAW

(considered by Council Overview Board on 28 January 2016)

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Council Overview Board was broadly supportive of the plans set out in the Cabinet report, and made the following comments and recommendations to Cabinet:

- The Board welcomes the proposal to set up a shared legal service, to be known as Orbis Public Law
- The Board wishes to emphasize the careful monitoring of the anticipated 10% savings, as set out in the business case.

RESPONSE:

I would like to thank all members of the Council Overview Board for their support for this proposal and am happy to endorse the recommendation for careful monitoring of the anticipated savings, which will be one of the priorities for the shared service as it moves forward with its joint plans.

David Hodge
Leader of the Council
2 February 2016

CABINET RESPONSE TO COUNCIL OVERVIEW BOARD

**REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET 2016/17 TO 2020/21
(considered by Council Overview Board on 28 January 2016)**

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Council Overview Board agreed on the following comments and recommendations to Cabinet:

That the Board:

1. confirms its support for the proposal to accept the option of raising council tax by 2%, to ensure additional ring-fenced funding for Adult Social Care;
2. welcomes the lobbying of government undertaken by the Leader of the Council to extend the option of raising council tax to our partners in Districts & Borough Councils, given that these authorities provide some non-statutory adult social care services;
3. asks that government be lobbied to review or lift the current restriction on council tax increases for local authorities;
4. asks the Cabinet to consider whether a referendum should be held regarding increasing council tax in order to maintain services;
5. wishes to emphasise the importance of prioritising income generation and efficiency savings, before cutting services and increasing council tax.

RESPONSE:

The preparation of the new Medium Term Financial Plan has been in the context of a late Provisional Settlement leading to an unprecedented reduction in government funding at very short notice. In response to this officers and cabinet members are working on the details of service savings that can realistically be delivered during 2016/17.

The Council is awaiting the Final Settlement which is expected to include the reporting requirements on the use of the 2% council tax increase for adult social care. This will lead to increased funding for the Council of £12m per year and is a welcome contribution to the £20m year on year demographic increase in demand for adult social care services. The Council also has to confront the loss of nearly £50m in government grant in 2016/17 and as a significant service, Adult Social Care will have to take its share of this reduction.

The Council Tax threshold is a central imposition on local decision making in the delivery of services by Government. Local communities through their elected representatives, who are democratically elected, should be able to set a council tax equivalent to the level of service demand led pressures a specific area needs in order to deliver front line services and to reduce financial impacts on other public services, i.e. NHS. Local Government is by far the most efficient part of the public sector and I will continue to make the point to Government to trust Local Government in taking responsibility and accountability for delivery local services.

However, the threshold exists and to raise council tax above this level is not the right decision at present for three reasons. First, the final settlement has not been announced, so to do so would be premature; second, the cost of holding a referendum when the Council is focusing its spend on essential areas; and third, it will be a distraction when the focus is on the Public Value Transformation programme.

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