

**SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT**

**DATE: 14 NOVEMBER 2017**

**LEAD OFFICER: TREVOR PUGH, STRATEGIC DIRECTOR FOR ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

**SUBJECT: IMPROVEMENTS AT NEWLANDS CORNER**



**SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

Cabinet approved the investment in improvements at Newlands Corner in October 2015. These involved improving the toilets, resurfacing the easy access trail in the woodland behind the visitor room and café, installing play and educational pieces and introducing car parking charges.

Following public engagement on the proposals the project was reviewed and it is now proposed to go ahead with only a limited upgrade of the facilities on site and the introduction of car parking charges. This and ongoing negotiations with the Albury Estate have altered the business plan and it has been reviewed by Surrey County Council's Investment Panel. The investment now proposed is £122,200 which will provide an income to fund the management of the site and reduce the annual payments that SCC have to make for managing the Countryside Estate. The Investment Panel approved the new business case subject to the final outcome from the negotiations with the Albury Estate. This report is being brought to the Cabinet Member before the conclusion of the negotiations to reduce any further delays in commencing the project. Work will not begin until the business plan has been approved.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

It is recommended that:

1. The revised proposals and the revised investment are approved.
2. The approval of the business plan is delegated to the Strategic Director for Environment and Infrastructure in consultation with the Director of Finance and the Cabinet Member, once the negotiations with the Albury Estate have concluded.

**REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Approval will allow work to commence on site providing upgraded toilet facilities and allowing the generation of an income from car parking charges. The income will help to fund the ongoing management of the site and contribute to the savings required from Countryside Service.

## **DETAILS:**

### **Key Issues:**

This project was originally approved by Cabinet on 27 October 2015 and a number of changes are proposed which make it necessary to revise the earlier approvals. Set out below are the relevant issues.

1. Negotiations with the landowners, the Albury Estate are now nearing conclusion.
2. The County Council has taken the decision not to progress with elements of the project at this stage. The revised project now requires a smaller investment of £122,200 to cover the costs of refurbishing the toilets, improving the car park surface, and installing the infrastructure required for charging for parking. The income from the parking has been revised downwards initially in the light of lower numbers of people who will use the trail and potentially the shorter dwell time as the result of the decision not to proceed with the play trail and associated improvements. However the numbers are expected to gradually increase over time.
3. This investment gives the Council the opportunity to refurbish the toilets and generate an income to fund the management of the site for the future. Albury Estate own the site and have an agreement with the County Council which allows us to provide and maintain the facilities on site. The County Council will carry out the improvements with the Surrey Wildlife Trust, who manage the site on our behalf. The income will then be shared between the Albury Estate, as landowner and the County Council. The County Council's share will be used to manage the site, and to protect the countryside.

### **CONSULTATION:**

4. Consultation has taken place with Highways staff on implementation of the parking charges. Surrey Wildlife Trust and The Albury Estate have been involved in all aspects of the project.
5. Local County Council and Borough Members have been consulted and kept informed of changes to the project.
6. The Public have been engaged through early public drop in sessions and updates on our website and responses to questions from the campaigners.

## **RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:**

7. The key financial risk is around numbers of vehicles which may drop in the early years but are expected to recover in subsequent years based on the pattern seen at other countryside sites.
8. Displacement parking may have an impact on other sites nearby or on the grass verge. Stumps will be installed along the verge to dissuade illegal parking and all parking around the area will be monitored once the charges have commenced. With advice from Highways the likely sites for displacement parking have been mapped.

9. Other risks around the income from the car park have been modelled to demonstrate the implications of varying the tariff, and the effect of lower or higher numbers of vehicles.
10. A further risk is the delay in implementing the project which risks the overall business plan for the Countryside Estate and puts pressure on other areas of the Estate to provide a greater income.

#### **Financial and Value for Money Implications**

11. The revised project requires a smaller investment of £122,200 which is expected to be repaid well within the proposed 10 year business plan. Sensitivity analysis is being undertaken and indicates that there would need to be a significant drop in numbers of vehicles per annum for the business plan not to generate a net income.
12. The income generated will fund the ongoing management of the site for the public and allow us to move the Estate to a more financially self-sustaining position.

#### **Section 151 Officer Commentary**

13. The County Council is facing a very serious financial situation, whereby there are still substantial actions to be identified and delivered to achieve a balanced budget in the current year and a sustainable budget plan for future years.
14. The Section 151 Officer can confirm that the capital investment proposed in this report is within the Council's approved Medium Term Financial Plan. The investment will lead to income which will fund the ongoing management of the site and contribute to the savings required from the Countryside Service. For the reasons set out in the report the proposed investment is less than originally envisaged, and is expected to result in a lower level of income, requiring alternative savings to be identified within the Countryside service.

#### **Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer**

15. This report sets out the revisions to the proposed improvements at Newlands Corner and provides for authority to approve the updated business plan to be delegated to the Strategic Director for Environment and Infrastructure in consultation with the Director of Finance and the Cabinet Member to reduce delays in implementing the project.
16. Legal Services will discuss any revised agreements required in relation to the project with the Albury Estate.

#### **Equalities and Diversity**

17. An equalities and diversity assessment was undertaken for the project and formed part of the Cabinet report in October 2015.

18. The potential implications for the following council priorities and policy areas have been considered. Where the impact is potentially significant a summary of the issues is 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
Environmental sustainability	No significant implications arising from this report
Public Health	Set out below.

### **Public Health implications**

19. The improvements of the facilities should attract people to come to Newlands Corner and stay longer, helping to make Surrey residents more physically active. Prices have been set at a reasonable level so as not to deter people from visiting. The use of the car park will be monitored to assess its impact on the numbers visiting and any issues relating to those who feel excluded because of the costs.

### **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:**

20. The Next Steps are :

- To start work on refurbishing the toilets and installing the infrastructure for car park charges. These will be installed once approval has been given for the investment. There is a 12-16 week lead in time for the whole project to be completed so we anticipate having the infrastructure in place early in 2018.
- The website will be updated and information put up on site to explain the work going on and when charges will be implemented.

---

#### **Contact Officer:**

Lisa Creaye-Griffin; Group Manager Countryside  
0208 541 9404

#### **Consulted:**

Local County and District Members, Finance and Legal Officers, Highways Parking Team, Surrey Wildlife Trust. The public via drop in sessions.

#### **Sources/background papers:**

- Cabinet Report: Investment in Improvements to the Visitor Facilities at Newlands Corner, 27 October 2015
-