

Select Committee Task Group Scoping Document

The process for establishing a task group is:

1. The Select Committee identifies a potential topic for a group
2. The Select Committee Chairman and the Scrutiny Officer complete the scoping template.
3. The Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviews the scoping document
4. The Select Committee agrees membership of the task and finish group.

<p>Review Topic: Countryside Management</p>
<p>Select Committee(s)</p> <p>Environment and Transport Select Committee</p>
<p>Relevant background</p> <p>Surrey County Council owns more than 2,300 hectares (6,500 acres) of countryside available for quiet enjoyment. It has also entered into access agreements with private landowners, providing public access to a total of over 3,500 hectares (10,000 acres) of Surrey's countryside.</p> <p>In May 2002, the County Council entered into a legal agreement with the Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) for the management of the countryside estate. Under this agreement land owned by the Council is leased to the Trust for 50 years and SWT manages the land and property. SWT also manages access agreements with private landowners on behalf of the Council.</p>
<p>Why this is a scrutiny item</p> <p>Surrey completed a Public Value Review of the Countryside Service during 2010/11. The Review recommended a number of changes aimed at refocusing the Countryside Service with a view of promoting a new strategic focus on the 'green elements' of the Council's rural landholding and on promotion of exploration by Surrey residents and visitors of Surrey's attractive countryside. It was anticipated that this would create opportunities to generate significant extra income to offset a reduction in Council costs and to improve services.</p> <p>In July 2011, there was an internal audit of the Surrey County Council Countryside Management Contract. The audit made a number of recommendations relating to contract management and governance and these either have been or are being actioned.</p> <p>In addition to this there have been three reports to the Environment and Transport Select Committee during the past eight months relating to the agreement between the Council and SWT in relation to governance and asset management. Members expressed concerns over a number of issues including financial viability and these were not allayed by the three reports to Committee.</p>

At the Environment and Transport Select Committee on 19 April 2012, the Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment, requested that the Committee set up a Task Group to consider how the management of Surrey's countryside could be conducted in a financially sustainable manner in the long term.

It is not intended that the Task Group will duplicate the work described above, although it will be informed by it.

What question is the task group aiming to answer?

- How can Surrey achieve financially sustainable and suitable management arrangements for its countryside?
 - Is the Rural Strategy still relevant / fit for purpose? and
 - How does/ should it relate to Countryside management in practice?
- What are the Council's statutory obligations in relation to Countryside Management?
 - What is being done in addition to statutory requirements?
 - Is this still appropriate? and
 - In what ways should these services be facilitated or provided?
- How can we ensure appropriate leadership and representation as part of the governance arrangements for countryside management?
- What is the vision for Countryside Estate?
 - Revenue generation/ financial sustainability?
 - Opportunities for revenue generation? and
 - Optimising the Estate
- How can the Council achieve more effective partnering arrangements?
 - What is the most effective and efficient way to manage Surrey's countryside (taking into account best practice)?

Aim

Aim: To develop a countryside management strategy that incorporates sound governance principles, is financially sustainable and promotes partnership working.

Scope (within / out of)

The review will cover the countryside owned by and managed on behalf of Surrey County Council.

Outcomes for Surrey / Benefits

This will achieve a satisfactory set of management arrangements with financial sustainability at their core.

Proposed work plan

The detailed scope and project plan will be developed by the Task Group. There will be an interim report to the Environment and Transport Select Committee in Autumn 2012 and a final report in January 2013.

Witnesses

External Organisations

Surrey Wildlife Trust
Surrey Hills Board
Surrey Rural Partnership
National Trust
National Farmers Union
Campaign to Protect Rural England (Surrey Branch)
Surrey County Association of Parish and Town Councils
DEFRA
Countryside Management Association
Forestry Commission
And others that are identified by the Task Group

Officers – To include

Ian Boast – Assistant Director
Lisa Creaye-Griffin -
Rob Fairbanks – Surrey Hills AONB Director

Members – To include

John Furey – Portfolio Holder

Useful Documents

Surrey Rural Strategy

Potential barriers to success (Risks / Dependencies)

This is a complex project that depends on sound project management by the Task Group to avoid project creep to ensure that it finishes within the projected timescales.

Equalities implications

These will be identified and considered as part of the detailed work.

Task Group Members	The Task Group will be drawn from the Environment and Transport Select Committee. To include Steve Renshaw, Mark Brett-Warburton, Simon Gimson, Michael Sydney, Stephen Cooksey and Chris Frost
Spokesman for the Group	Steve Renshaw, Chairman of Environment and Transport Select Committee
Scrutiny Officer/s	Jacqui Hird, Scrutiny Manager

List of Witnesses

Adam Wallace, Natural England

Rob Fairbanks, AONB

Bridget Bidell, Hampton Estate

Michael Baxter, Albury Estate

David Kennington, National Trust

Andrew Bircher, Paul Stacey and Rod Shaw, Mole Valley DC

Paul Wickham, Surrey Nature Partnership

Matthew Woodcock and Karen Guest, the Forestry Commission

Lisa Creaye-Griffin, Bronwen Fisher and Adrian Sancroft, Surrey County Council

Lawrence Crow, Woodland Management Consultant

Jonathan Gasson and Henry Robinson Ministry of Defence

Surrey Wildlife Trust, Nigel Davenport, Mark Pearson, Sarah Jane Chimbwandira, Heather Hawker

Graham Wilkinson and Chris Chaney, Surrey Rural Partnership

Graham Butler and Janet Barton, Countryside Access Forum

Background to the Surrey Wildlife Contract

Historically, the County Council had been acquiring land for many years in order to preserve from development areas in Surrey countryside that were of high amenity and wildlife value. By 2002, the landholding had reached 3,563 hectares and included that largest NNR in South East England at Chobham Common and other wildlife habitats of international importance. The County Council has a legal duty to maintain the nature conservation value of its holdings, coupled with a desire to ensure the long term viability of the Estate for recreation and a requirement to make long term financial savings. For this reason, the County Council made a decision to outsource the management of the Countryside Estate.

In 2002, Surrey Wildlife Trust took on the management of the County Council's Countryside Estate. At the time this was seen as a ground breaking arrangement. The underlying principle was to give Surrey Wildlife Trust the responsibility of managing the Estate to deliver the service in accordance with the contract allowing a reasonable amount of freedom to enable them to generate income that would not normally be available to the County Council.

The financial basis of the contract was a payment made by the County Council to Surrey Wildlife Trust reducing on a sliding scale from 2006/07 until 2012/13 and then subject to review. The aim of the agreement was to protect the service on the Estate for the future and allow improvements to that service.

The Estate was leased to Surrey Wildlife Trust in 2 leases. The first lease included the land and visitor facilities that formed the public service estate plus the Norbury Sawmill and tied housing. The phase 2 lease covered the commercial property such as farms and cafes. The County Council spent £1.5 million on the property before it was included in the leases to ensure they were all fit for purpose.

The governance arrangements included a Partnership Committee that meets twice a year to oversee the way the contract is working and to look at strategic issues. The Partnership Committee is comprised a total of 11 representatives from Surrey Wildlife Trust, Surrey County Council and a representative of the Access Agreement Owners.

The Small Holdings Estate

Overview

1,223 hectares (3,022 acres) with approx 100 tenants occupying a mixture of dairy farms, grassland farms (i.e. beef), smallholdings (incl horticultural units) and grazing as well as cottages.

As of 31 March 2012 cv £43.674m (2011 £36m); rent roll £497,909pa; yield 1.29%

(Chesterton Humberts report and valuation 31-3-12)

Income and expenditure

The returns for the Estate are low but that is typical for this type of land as the yield is low. The rents are determined with advice from Chesterton Humberts at the appropriate times. Rents are periodically reviewed or renewed, they are not set annually.

There is latent value in the rental portfolio that can only be accessed when contracts come up for renewal.

Appendix 5: Summary of Countryside Partnerships with SCC Involvement							
Partnership	Type of Partnership	Host/employer	Total Partners(Funding Partners)	Number of staff	Total Budget Expenditure Estimated for 2012/13	SCC Contribution 2012/13	SCC Members on Partnership
Surrey Hills AONB	Joint committee to carry out statutory duties relating to AONB	SCC	13 (8)	9 FTE Some on fixed term contracts	£622,675 With £249,800 of that for the Regional Tourism Project	£26,900	John Furey, Michael Sydney, rep. Tandridge DC
Lower Mole Countryside Management Project	Countryside Management Project (CMP) non statutory but helps with stat role re biodiversity	SCC	7(6)	4 FTE Some on fixed term contracts	£190,000	£32,000	Colin Taylor, Chris Frost
Downlands CMP	Countryside Management Project (CMP) non statutory but helps with stat role re biodiversity	SCC	7(6)	8 Some on fixed term contracts	£423,000	£32,000	Angela Fraser, Michael Sydney
Surrey Heathland Project	CMP to assist in managing the heathland of Surrey. non statutory but helps with stat role re biodiversity	SCC	13(4)	2	£98,000	£29,000	Michael Sydney

Surrey Countryside Partnership	SWT/SCC partnership agreement to manage the Countryside Estate	Surrey Wildlife Trust	3 (2)	31.2 FTE	£1.8m	£954,000	John Furey, Linda Kemeny, Helen Clack, Tim Hall, Bill Barker
Basingstoke Canal	JC with Hants.CC and riparian local authorities along the Canal	Hampshire CC	12(8)	10	£642,000	£153,000	Linda Kemeny, Chris Pitt, Ben Carasco, Diana Smith
Gatwick Greenspace Project	CMP on edge of Crawley/Horley	Sussex Wildlife Trust	8(8)	2		£13,000	Helyn Clack, Kay Hammond
High Weald AONB	JC to deliver statutory duties relating to the AONB	East Sussex CC	16(16)	8	£360,000	£2,900	Michael Sydney
Blackwater Valley Countryside Management Partnership (BVCMP)	CMP, urban fringe along the River Blackwater	Hampshire County Council	13 (13)	3	£111,500	£13,000	Denis Fuller
Blackwater Valley Road	Contribution to the maintenance of the landscaping on the BVR carried out by BVCMP					£21,000	
Thames Landscape Strategy	Regional Landscape and Access Partnership	Richmond Upon Thames	15 (15)	5	£113,00	£3,000	Peter Hickman, Ernest Mallett

Colne Valley Partnership	Regional Partnership	Buckinghamshire	10(10)	3.3	£54,000	0	Carol Coleman
Surrey Biodiversity Partnership	Partnership to collate data on biodiversity across the County, delivers on statutory biodiversity duty.	SWT	12(4)	1.5	£90,000	18,000	No members involved.
Surrey Rural Partnership	Non statutory partnership that meets to influence policy and strategy and ensure best use of opportunities for funding.	Community Action Surrey	32(4)	1	£10,000	£2,500	Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport

Local Nature Partnerships

Local Nature Partnerships were created in response to the Natural Environment White Paper: Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature

The overall purpose of an LNP is to:

- Drive positive change in the local natural environment, taking a strategic view of the challenges and opportunities involved and identifying ways to manage it as a system for the benefit of nature, people and the economy.
- Contribute to achieving the Government's national environmental objectives locally, including the identification of local ecological networks, alongside addressing local priorities.
- Become local champions influencing decision-making relating to the natural environment and its value to social and economic outcomes, in particular, through working closely with local authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and Health and Wellbeing Boards.

Effective LNPs will have:

- a shared strategic vision and priorities which focus on outcomes
- a broad membership
- effective and accountable governance and leadership
- the ability to be influential with both local and strategic decision makers
- knowledge to raise awareness of the value of the natural environment as well as the services it
- a good overview of activity within the area to add value to existing collaboration and identify and fill gaps – in Surrey a key need that has emerged from the stakeholder engagement is a desire for co-ordination across the county.

Suggested themes for LNPs include:

- sustainable land use and management,
- green economic growth,
- quality of life and health & well-being

LNPs will utilise the skills and networks of organisations outside conservation. Help to co-ordinate and support funding bids. They will provide information on sustainable management and importance of ecosystems as well as provide co-ordination and support for landscape scale projects ensuring these join up and avoid duplication. They have an important role in planning, equal footing to LEPs.

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