

## **ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT SELECT COMMITTEE**

**6 March 2013**

**Item under consideration:**

### **COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT TASK GROUP REPORT**

1. It was suggested that a review of the Countryside Estate take into account the issue of damage to bridleways. It was noted that the recommendations of the report sought to manage access to the countryside on a broad basis, which should also include BOATs.
2. A key element of the review was proposals to encourage joint working between smaller landowners. At present there are a number of 'small' operations taking place in the Surrey countryside and it was felt that this did not encourage efficiency. The Select Committee expressed the view that the encouragement of joint working between these parties would increase efficiency, improve biodiversity and create new job opportunities.
3. Concern was expressed that the Member Asset Group had already considered a review of the contract between Surrey Wildlife Trust and Surrey County Council (Recommendation 1). It was clarified that the proposals of the Task Group aimed to review a strategic vision as opposed to adopting a more piecemeal approach. This was welcomed by the Committee as an opportunity to improve the financial sustainability of the Countryside Estate.
4. It was noted by the Committee that an asset management plan was still outstanding following a previous review of the existing Surrey Wildlife Trust contract in July 2011. It was requested that the current asset management plan, be considered by the Committee, following the 2013 elections.
5. Members were keen to stress that ensuring the retention of 'value' from the Council's Small Holdings and Farm Estate (Recommendation 2) did not just refer to financial aspects.
6. The Committee felt that proposals to review and refresh the Council's approach to rural and countryside partnership working should clearly emphasise the fact that the County was not seeking to 'take control' but rather, facilitate an open and effective dialogue with stakeholders.
7. Members expressed their disappointment at the fact that an update report on the Surrey Hills Enterprises Trademark had not been presented to the Select Committee prior to its submission to Cabinet, as previously promised. Officers apologised for this oversight and agreed to consult more closely with the Committee on such issues in the future.
8. The Committee agreed that the Task Group should reconvene following the elections to continue in a policy advisory role and to monitor the implementation of the recommendations.

9. Subject to the amendments reflected below, the Select Committee endorsed the recommendations of the Task Group.

**Recommendations:**

**Recommendation 1** – The Strategic Director for Environment & Infrastructure should review the contract between Surrey Wildlife Trust and Surrey County Council. This review should include:

- All aspects of the contract;
- The development and measurement of more clearly defined outputs that ensure value for money;
- A review of the governance arrangements;
- The development of a communication strategy to promote the benefit of the partnership arrangements to Members of the County Council and Surrey residents and;
- That the Environment & Transport Select Committee reviews the Countryside Estate's asset management plan at a future meeting.

**Timescale: report to Environment & Transport Select Committee – October 2013.**

**Recommendation 2** - The Strategic Director for Change & Efficiency reviews the management arrangements for the Council's Small Holdings and Farm Estate to ensure that they retain value and maximise economic returns.

**Timescale: report to Environment & Transport Select Committee – October 2013.**

**Recommendation 3** – The Strategic Director for Environment & Infrastructure reviews and refreshes the approach to rural and countryside partnership working. This review should include:

- A revised register of all partnerships within the County, setting out the purpose of each organisation and financial contributions and representation from the County;
- That this register is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it continues to be relevant;
- That a culture of partnership (rather than direction) is encouraged and fostered within the County, to encourage dialogue and facilitation between the Council and stakeholders and;
- That Surrey County Council actively engages with the (new) Surrey Nature Partnership, with the County representative on this body being the Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment.

**Timescale: report to Environment & Transport Select Committee – July 2013.**

**Recommendation 4** – The Strategic Director for Environment & Infrastructure reviews and refreshes the approach to the rural economy. This review should consider that:

- The County Council maintains policies, which enable residents to live and work in the rural community. This will require working with partners to facilitate both affordable housing and job opportunities (including apprentices);
- The County Council supports the development of the wood fuel industry in Surrey and encourages co-operation between the owners of smaller woods; and
- The County Council considers, where suitable, the prioritisation of the use of wood fuel in its own buildings, subject to approval of a business case.

**Timescale: report to Environment & Transport Select Committee – July 2013.**

**Recommendation 5** – The Strategic Director for Environment & Infrastructure reviews and refreshes the approach to tourism. This review should consider that:

- Specific management plans are created for iconic locations in Surrey;
- Where appropriate, the Olympic Legacy is used as a catalyst for key decisions; and
- Objectives are agreed with the AONB to reflect the strength and potential of the brand for Surrey.

**Timescale: report to Environment & Transport Select Committee – July 2013.**

**Steve Renshaw**  
**Select Committee Chairman**

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