

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

DATE: 26 MARCH 2013

REPORT OF: ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT SELECT COMMITTEE

LEAD MEMBER: SIMON GIMSON, TASK GROUP CHAIRMAN

SUBJECT: TASK GROUP REPORT: COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT



SUMMARY OF ISSUE:

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

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.

Following the submission of reports to the Environment & Transport Select Committee detailing the work of SWT, Members decided to form a Task Group with the aim of making a series of recommendations that would help to ensure that the management of Surrey's countryside estate can be conducted in a financially sustainable manner.

The specific themes considered were:

- The land owned by Surrey County Council and managed externally;
- The management of the Small Holdings and Farm Estate;
- Partnership working;
- The rural economy; and
- Tourism.

The full report of the Task Group is attached as **Annexe A**.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that:

1. The Strategic Director for Environment and Infrastructure reviews 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; and

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- The development of a communication strategy to promote the benefit of the partnership arrangements to Members of the County Council and Surrey residents.
2. The Strategic Director for Change and Efficiency reviews the management arrangements for the Council's Small Holdings and Farm Estate to ensure that they retain value and maximise economic returns.
 3. The Strategic Director for Environment and 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 annual basis to ensure it continues to be relevant;
 - That a culture of partnership (rather than direction) is encouraged and fostered within the County; 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.
 4.
 - a) The County Council maintains policies which enable residents to live and work in the rural community. This will require working with partners to create both affordable housing and job opportunities (including apprentices).
 - b) The County Council supports the development of the wood fuel industry in Surrey and encourages cooperation between the owners of smaller woods.
 - c) The County Council prioritises the use of wood fuel in its own buildings, subject to approval of a business case.
 5.
 - a) Specific management plans are created for iconic locations in Surrey.
 - b) The Olympic Legacy is used as a catalyst for key decisions.
 - c) Objectives are agreed with the AONB to reflect the strength and potential brand for Surrey.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

The recommendations in this report will assist the Council in ensuring that Surrey's countryside estate is managed in a long-term, financially sustainable manner.

Risk Management Implications:

The recommendations put forward in this report will reduce the risks associated with management of the Council's countryside estate by reviewing existing contract arrangements and improving financial sustainability.

Financial and Value for Money Implications

The recommendations put forward in this report will assist the Council in achieving value for money by improving the management of the Countryside Estate to maximise returns and ensure that it is financially sustainable on a long-term basis.

Section 151 Officer Commentary

There are no direct or immediate financial implications resulting from this report. The recommendations are intended to improve value for money, and any financial implications will be highlighted as proposals are developed.

Equalities and Diversity

No negative implications identified, however the adoption of a new communications strategy would need to take into account forms of contact with hard to reach and disadvantaged groups.

Climate change/carbon emissions implications

No specific climate change or emissions implications identified, however the recommendations put forward in this report will have a positive impact upon the environmental sustainability of the Council's property portfolio. Proposals to review management arrangements and place greater demand on local supply chains will create efficiencies and reduce the need to rely on supplies from external sources.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

The Environment & Transport Select Committee will receive update reports in 2013 to monitor the implementation of the Task Group's approved recommendations. Any significant issues will be referred to the Cabinet.

Contact Officer:

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Consulted:

- 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 (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).
- Nigel Davenport, Mark Pearson, Sarah Jane Chimbwandira and Heather Hawker (Surrey Wildlife Trust).
- Graham Wilkinson and Chris Chaney (Surrey Rural Partnership).
- Graham Butler and Janet Barton (Countryside Access Forum).

Annexes:

Annexe A – Task Group report

Appendix 1 – Task Group scoping document

Appendix 2 – List of witnesses

Appendix 3 – Background to the Surrey Wildlife Contract

Appendix 4 – Background to the Small Holdings Estate

Appendix 5 – Summary of Countryside Partnerships with County Council involvement

Sources/background papers:

- SCC Public Value Review of the Countryside Service, 2011/12.
 - SCC Internal Audit of Countryside Management, 2011.
 - Reports re: Surrey Wildlife Trust to Environment & Transport Select Committee, September 2011, January 2012 and April 2012.
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