

Environment Select Committee

06 September 2018



A Joint Strategy for Surrey's Countryside Estate

Purpose of the report:

To update the Members of the Committee on the development of a joint strategy for Surrey's Countryside Estate, establish a Member Reference Group and agree how the Committee would like to input and engage with the development of the Strategy.

Introduction:

1. Surrey County Council owns 6,500 acres of countryside estate, and a further 3,500 is managed under access agreements. All of the Countryside Estate (Estate) is open for the public to visit. It is our responsibility to ensure the countryside is cared for and managed so Surrey residents and visitors can access and enjoy it, and we know it is highly valued by our residents.
2. The Partnership between Surrey County Council (SCC) and the Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) was formally established in 2002 when 10,000 acres of countryside owned, or managed under access agreement by SCC, was leased to the SWT for 50 years.
3. The Estate ranges from the heathland of Ockham and Wisley Commons to the downland and woodland of Norbury Park. SWT makes sure that paths can be safely used, dangerous trees and branches are made safe, sensitive habitats and species are protected and fly-tipping is removed and that access to the countryside is maintained.
4. The current annual cost of managing the Estate is £2.1million of which the County Council contributes £425,000 (2018/19). With ever increasing pressure on local government finances, particularly as a result of the demand for social care services, we have been working on ways that our countryside estate can be self-funding so it is more resilient to changes in public sector finance. This will ensure that the care and management that the countryside needs can be guaranteed for the future.
5. To ensure that we are able to achieve this in perpetuity we need a clear vision and a long term strategy that is underpinned by a robust business planning process, efficient governance and performance management.
6. The Government have recently stated that they want to become the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than they found it and pass it on to the next generation a natural environment protected and enhanced for the future. 'A Green Future' 25 year Environmental

Plan was published in January 2018. The plan sets out what the government will do to improve the environment within a generation.

There are six key areas that the plan has identified:

1. Using and managing land sustainably.
 2. Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes.
 3. Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing.
 4. Increasing resource efficiency, and reducing pollution and waste.
 5. Securing clean, productive and biologically diverse seas and oceans.
 6. Protecting and improving the global environment.
7. The Strategy we are now working on will translate this into action on the ground in Surrey.

Countryside Estate Vision and Strategy

8. In November 2017 Mike Goodman, the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport launched the Countryside Vision:

Giving access to our countryside to support recreation, health and wellbeing now and in the future in a way that will enhance biodiversity, our landscape and is financially self-sufficient.

What this means for:

People, Volunteering and Learning

- Engaging people in managing the countryside and encouraging greater understanding and support for our work. Encouraging volunteering across all aspects of managing the countryside.
- Working with the public and local groups to enhance the Estate.
- Using the Estate to engage all ages in active pursuits and learning activities such as bushcraft and Forest schools.
- Ensuring the access is properly managed and developing new means of access providing a more sustainable means of travel and access to open space.

Natural Capital and Landscape

- Developing landscape conservation to enhance our existing best sites for conservation and developing a better network of joined up sites.
- Promoting key areas of the Estate to develop exemplars of how the management of our natural capital can benefit the people of Surrey as well as the landscape and wildlife.

A Sustainable Future

- Working together to establish financial self-sufficiency for managing the countryside, reducing reliance on public funding and protecting the countryside from future reductions in public finance.

- Developing income generating projects that are appropriate for the locations and have no adverse impact on them.
- Ensuring the use of all the built properties to enhance the Estate

Rural Business and Skills

- Promoting land based businesses on the Estate and engaging the managers in demonstrating their business to the public e.g. farming and forestry.
9. In line with the government's Environmental plan, SCC and SWT are jointly developing a 25 year Strategy for the Countryside Estate, engaging adjoining land managers and the public to ensure that the Vision is delivered.
 10. The strategy will also build on Surrey's Rural Statement that sets out the key issues, challenges and opportunities for rural Surrey (Annex 2).
 11. To help us develop the Strategy it is proposed that we engage with key stakeholders groups and the public to gather their views on the countryside:
 - how they use it
 - what it should look like in 5 years' time
 - what it should look like in 2042 (in line with the government's 25 year plan)
 12. To enable us to gather this information we will use a wide range of tools including face to face meetings, targeted workshops, forums, online surveys, site surveys and a public engagement exercise.
 13. There is currently a Countryside Estate Business Plan for 2018/19 which sets out how the Partnership will continue to work towards the vision for self- sufficiency and a sustainable future for the countryside by focussing on key income-generating activity. The projects set out in the plan will be supported by staff in both organisations.
 14. From 2019/20 a three year business plan is now being developed to deliver the strategy. This plan will be rolled forward each year and will be a key document in the delivery of the Countryside Estate Strategy.

Recommendations:

The Environment Select Committee too,

- i. endorse the approach set out in this report,
- ii. establish a Member Reference Group and agree how the Committee would like to input into and engage with the public engagement material, business plan and strategy development. Draft Terms of Reference for the MRG are attached as Annex 3.

Next steps:

Activity	Timescale
Initial engagement with Key Stakeholders	July – September 2018
Proposals to Member Reference Group	September 2018
Engagement with Public	October-November 2018
Member Reference Group – Review of Engagement Material	November 2018
Member Reference Group – Review of Draft Strategy and Three Year Business Plan	January 2019
Environment Select Committee	22 nd February 2019
Strategy to Cabinet for approval	26 th February 2019
Strategy Launch	Spring 2019

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Annexes

Annex 1 Surrey Countryside Estate Partnership Business Plan 2018/19

https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/160078/SCC-and-SWT-Partnership-Business-Plan-March2018.pdf

Annex 2 A Rural Statement for Surrey

https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/82110/SCREF-Surrey-Rural-Statement-final.pdf

Annex 3 Proposed Terms of Reference for Countryside Estate Strategy Member Reference Group

Sources/background papers:

A Green Future – 25 Year Environmental Plan

Annex 3

PROPOSED TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR COUNTRYSIDE ESTATE STRATEGY MEMBER REFERENCE GROUP

BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

Surrey County Council owns 6,500 acres of Countryside Estate (Estate), and a further 3,500 is managed under access agreements.

The Partnership between Surrey County Council (SCC) and the Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) was formally established in 2002 when 10,000 acres of countryside owned, or managed under access agreement by SCC, was leased to the SWT for 50 years.

In November 2017 the Countryside Vision was launched:

Giving access to our countryside to support recreation, health and wellbeing now and in the future in a way that will enhance biodiversity, our landscape and is financially self-sufficient.

In line with the governments Environmental Plan SCC and SWT are jointly developing a 25 year strategy for the countryside estate to ensure that the vision is delivered. The strategy will also build on Surrey's rural statement that sets out the key issues, challenges and opportunities for rural Surrey. The strategy will be launched in spring 2019

ROLE OF THE MEMBER REFERENCE GROUP

The project team believe that a Member Reference Group would add value to this important project. In devising this new strategy for the Estate we would seek to find out how you as key stakeholders see the role of the Estate and how we can ensure that it is sustainable, accessible, biodiverse. That rural business and skills are supported and that the public understand and are engaged with it by:

- Reviewing the material for public engagement
- Reviewing the Draft Three Year Business Plan
- Reviewing the Draft Strategy

TIMESCALES AND REPORTING DATES

July – September 2018	Initial Consultation with Key Stakeholders
6 th September 2018	Environment Select Committee
September 2018	Proposals to Member Reference Group
October –November 2018	Engagement with Public
November 2018	Member Reference Group – Engagement
January 2019	Member Reference Group – Business Plan
and Strategy	
22 nd February 2019	Draft Strategy to Select Committee
26 th February 2019	Strategy to Cabinet for approval
Spring 2019	Strategy Launch

OFFICER SUPPORT AND CONTACTS

Project Sponsors: Lisa Creaye-Griffin, Countryside Group Manager
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