



# Outline of the 25 year Strategy for the Countryside Estate

## Purpose of This Strategy

The Estate has been acquired by the County Council over the last 90 years and has been managed to conserve the landscape and provide access for residents and visitors.

The landscape has been shaped by centuries of human activity, originally to provide food and shelter and later to provide attractive landscapes to enjoy. Management is key to ensuring the landscapes we love survive into the future. The amount of management required varies with the level of use and the size of those areas of countryside. The smaller the area the more management it needs if it is going to continue to provide habitats for wildlife and access for people.

As the needs of the population evolve and the landscape is under pressure from development, we now need to look again at the purpose of the Estate and how we manage it for the future. Its original purpose was to protect the land from development, over the years the importance of that has continued along with the need to allow access and manage the land for conservation. It also has the potential to be managed to demonstrate examples of management for flood control.

There is increasing demand for housing and work space in the County. The residents of these houses will need services and an infrastructure that allows them to travel for work and recreation. Part of our plan is to make travel to our open spaces easier and to ensure those open spaces are linked allowing people and wildlife to move around the county away from the road system. In order to do this we need a countryside estate that is properly funded and to work effectively with neighbouring land owners.

As this pressure increases it is more important that those areas of the Estate provide:

- Access for health and well-being,
- Areas of well managed habitats that join up to create larger better linked areas for access and wildlife and long-term community benefits, e.g. flood relief.
- An opportunity for the public to engage with nature

This strategy outlines the plan for achieving this and demonstrating how the comments from our public engagement are shaping those plans.

## **Engagement with Stakeholders**

Output from:

- Caring for our Countryside Survey
- Annual visitor surveys across the Estate
- Workshops with residents and users of the Estate
- Focus groups looking at attitudes to the countryside, why people visit and what they do

## **The Challenge**

### **Wildlife Conservation- decline in species in the County**

- Conservation designations cover over 70% of the Countryside Estate
- A third of the species in the County are in decline for a variety of reasons but one of those is the fragmentation of habitat.
- The Estate is highly designated and has the potential in conjunction with other landowners to join up those sites and create a better network of conservation sites that are strong enough to survive the changes that will take place over the next 25 years and beyond.

### **Public Expectations**

- It's importance to people and opposition to change.
- Desire for greater access
- To access the countryside for free
- Working with the public requires people to facilitate that interaction, a lack of SCC resources now makes that difficult

### **Development pressure**

- More development in the County, the demand for housing and associated services for the growing population in Surrey.
- The effect of people coming out of London for recreation puts a great deal of strain on the infrastructure and some popular sites
- There is a need for more local sites linked to built-up areas to make access easier via means other than private cars.
- More built up areas leading to greater likelihood of flooding and poor air quality because of increasing traffic

### **Visitors**

- The demographic of our visitors appears to be largely in the age range of 45 upwards with a percentage of families with children being around 11-18% of the visits. The percentage is slightly higher to some sites but it shows that the attraction for families and children is not very high.

The percentage of families coming to country parks across England is around 55% (Visit England's statistics)

- Interactions with the public show a lack of understanding about countryside management.

### **Local authority funding**

- Management of countryside sites is non statutory meaning it must compete with the statutory functions of the local authority for funding

## **Themes**

- **Education and Engagement**
- **Access for Health and Wellbeing**
- **Natural Capital and Landscape**

## **Principals for Managing the Estate**

- **Conservation of the legal designations will take priority**
  - This will cover for example the conservation, heritage and landscape designations
  - Work on site will prioritise those and collaboration with adjoining landowners to create a network of nature sites.
- **Access is the fundamental principal underpinning all management**
  - Access for as wide a range of people will underpin management of all sites
- **Engagement with Public**
  - To include how we engage the public in managing the Estate
  - How we expand educational activities on key sites
- **Demonstration of ways to improve natural capital, and integrate access with conservation**
  - Discussions with other landowners and managers has presented the opportunity to work in collaboration to deliver wider benefits across the county
  - There is an expectation that as we work across the whole county, we can take the lead in demonstrating how it can be done and facilitating the collaboration with others
- **Looking at the types of facilities and activities that would attract a wider range of visitors**
  - Young
  - Families
  - Older people
  - Schools/organised groups

## **The Mechanism**

The Estate needs to be adequately financed to provide access for health and wellbeing and to engage the public in a way that will help guarantee a better understanding of the natural world leading to a real connection that will mean people loving and respecting their local sites.

There are 28 sites across the Countryside Estate spread from Tatsfield and Limsfield in the East to Chobham and Rodborough in the west. These sites vary in size, habitats, proximity to communities and facilities provided. There is therefore a variety of ways that they can be managed over the 25 years of this Strategy. Not all sites are the same as the table on page 6 shows

## **What Happens Next**

- To carry out an audit of all sites and categorise them into a hierarchy of sites fitting into the categories below:
  - Country Park –invest in providing more facilities to attract a wider demographic, including educational activities such as Forest Schools
  - Sites of wildlife significance where the management will be to promote that significance and engage the public through educational activities with the site.
  - Small local sites where management will be to provide lower key public facilities such as car park. information boards and waymarked trails
- Promote the sites better locally
- Work with community forums and other groups to develop wider community engagement with site management.
- Work with other organisations to develop landscape wide projects that can have a significant impact on the natural capital of the County, including linking up fragmented sites and improving the opportunities for people access the countryside.

## **Our Partners**

- National Trust, Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission, RSPB, Districts and Boroughs, Surrey Wildlife Trust,
- Surrey Countryside Access Forum
- Community Forums Groups for Chobham, Ockham and Wisley, Norbury Park, and Worpleson Group of Commons
- Surrey Hills AONB
- Surrey Community Action
- Wotton Estate
- Albury Estate
- Hampton Estate
- Hampshire County Council

## **Demonstrators/Case Studies**

- Digi Tourism - New ways to enjoy the landscape and learn
- Urban2Landscape – Project linking people with the landscape
- North Downs Facilitation Fund - The funding is for a person or organisation (facilitator) to help a group of farmers and other land managers work together to:
  - improve the natural environment at a landscape rather than single-farm scale
  - achieve greater improvements than individual holdings could on their own

## **Potential Projects**

- Managing North Downs habitats at landscape scale
- Gateway sites for the public to start exploring the Surrey Hills, including the downland and heathland.
- Demonstrator site on how activities in the countryside can be managed to conserve sensitive landscapes.
- Engaging the public in the management of their local sites building on the work of the Surrey Countryside Partnerships
- Developing a fund to pay for countryside management-from appeals to business/philanthropic givers to develop a permanent managed fund.

**Annex 1 (complete draft to be available for Select Committee)**

**Countryside Sites owned by the County Council and managed as part of the Countryside Estate**

<b>Site Name</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Habitat</b>	<b>Nearby Community</b>	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Norbury Park	530 hectares	Woodland, chalk grassland Majority is designated SSSI	Fetcham Bookham Leatherhead Dorking Mickleham West Humble	3 Farms, including Bocketts Farm 3 car parks Trails	
Chobham Common	575 hectares	Largest National Nature Reserve in the South East Internationally protected SPA heathland, rare birds such as Dartford Warbler 97% Common land	Chobham Sunningdale Windlesham	6 car parks	
Ockham and Wisley Commons	330 hectares	Internationally protected heathland 48% Common land	Ockham Wisley Guildford	3 car parks Café, Toilets (Ockham) Chatley Heath Semaphore Tower	Intersected by A3 and M25 Pond Farm, SWT operational base located on Wisley Common