

Appendix 2

Surrey Countryside Management Collaboration Group

Purpose of the Meeting

All organisations have limited resources but we all value the countryside of Surrey, for its wildlife, landscape, economic value and its contribution to health and wellbeing. In the current financial climate we believe that by working together we can make a positive impact on the countryside of Surrey.

You were invited to this meeting as representatives of organisations and networks with an interest in countryside management and the future of Surrey with a view to developing a shared vision and identifying opportunities to collaborate. We are seeking your views on the ideas presented and exploring opportunities to work together. Appendix 1 gives two examples where we are currently embarking on collaborative projects.

The County Council's Vision

The County Council's vision for Countryside Management is being developed from the Task Group Review and includes:

- Conserving and enhancing the Countryside of Surrey
- Greater collaborative working with other organisations to maximise the impact of our limited resources.
- Surrey Nature Partnership becoming the lead strategic partnership for the Environment in Surrey feeding into the LEPs and other key networks.
- A better awareness and understanding of what Countryside Management is all about among visitors and residents. A combined understanding of the Environmental Education resource across the County.
- A strong brand or suite of brands for Surrey, to promote to visitors
- A better network of visitor facilities at Iconic sites across the County, e.g. Ockham and Wisley, Newlands Corner, Chobham Common, Leith Hill.
- Increased use of renewable energy in County buildings focusing on woodfuel to increase the economic viability of woodland management across the County and support the supply chain with sites for wood fuel production ("hubs")
- A Green Infrastructure strategy to link existing green space, and identify potential green space to ensure that development doesn't have a negative impact on the overall environment of the County and providing residents with easy access to green space and walking and cycling routes.
- A revised Surrey Rural Strategy led by the Surrey Rural Partnership.

What Surrey County Council is Offering

The County Council currently spends a net budget of £2.5 million per annum directly on countryside management and access, including managing the Public Rights of Way Network. This includes 50 staff on full and part-time contracts delivering the service.

We can offer the Group

- An overview of Projects, collating what is going on across the County
- Communications and liaison with the public working through its existing structures
- Seeking collective funding opportunities' supporting bids
- Strategy setting with members of the Group
- Bringing key people together
- Information sharing

Challenges and Opportunities

In managing the Countryside of Surrey there are a number of challenges however many of those present opportunities:

- Squeezed resources both people and cash could be combined across organisations to deliver projects and lead to more innovative ideas on how we use land and activities to generate an income and combine our resources to bid for funding
- Dealing with development and the economic growth agenda is an opportunity to look at new ways of planning our development to include open space and access to services, via routes for cycling and walking.
- The large resident population creates a demand for recreation and places to visit, research in 2012 valued the visitor economy in Surrey at £1.85 billion per year and highlighted areas of potential growth in the Basingstoke Canal, cycling, walking, cultural tourism, vineyards and golf courses. For example 4 million people live within 1 hours drive of the Basingstoke Canal.
- Proximity to London adds to congestion on the roads but Surrey's natural beauty makes the County popular for recreation including mountain biking and road cycling which has an economic benefit.
- Making the most of our land resource, opens up the opportunity to develop visitor facilities at key locations, such as the Iconic locations mentioned above. However this needs to be done in a strategic fashion to avoid sites being developed to the detriment of other sites.
- There is a relative lack of access to green space in the northern part of the County which is contributing to some of the health issues. Surrey as a whole has one of the highest areas of public accessible land in the Country and a large proportion of this is across the North Downs and Heathlands of the County, owned by the Forestry Commission (FC), Ministry of Defence (MoD), National Trust (NT), Surrey County Council (SCC), The Borough and District Councils, and Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) . This gives us an opportunity to see what we can do together to link these areas through a green space strategy providing corridors to give better access for people and better connectivity for wildlife.
- Perception of Surrey to visitors as London's playground, we now have the opportunity to build on existing brands and promote the County as more than the hinterland of London.
- A Population that is now largely urban, with a lack of understanding of countryside management, there are a number of environmental education initiatives, could we combine forces to deliver clear messages and spread our influence?

Case Studies

Examples of how we are working together

Newlands Corner Visitor Facilities

The current visitor facilities are outdated and don't make the most of the potential to tell the story of the site and generate an income. The site is owned by the Albury Estate, Surrey County Council (SCC) has an Access Agreement on the site, and Surrey Wildlife Trust manage the access on SCC's behalf. All three of these partners have invested in the current visitor facilities. The Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) has an interest in the site as a potential gateway to the AONB and Guildford Borough Council are the planning authority. A small project group has been established bringing all these parties together to develop ideas for new facilities that will fit into the landscape and provide the scope to enhance the visitor experience for the 600,000 visits to the site each year and to increase the income generated by the site to cover the costs of managing it.

It was felt an iconic building that made a statement would be right for this site and could attract the necessary funding however the ambitions of the project will only be possible if the parties work together as they all have something to bring to the table.

In the wider context this is an important development to fit within a network of visitor facilities across the County. There would be little point in investing in a development that provided facilities that are already available in the vicinity.

Economic Woodlands

Surrey has 22 percent woodland cover, which makes woodlands a major ecological, amenity and economic resource in the county. However some of characteristics that make Surrey's woods special such as the relatively large number of small woods, high proportion of broadleaf species and the extensive conservation designations also contribute to a higher costs of management which has contributed, in part to many woodlands falling out of traditional management with consequential declines in biodiversity. The council, has many opportunities to address this problem, through countryside management practices, other land holdings and it's buildings heat demands. A co-ordinated approach is therefore critical to increasing the financial feasibility of environmentally sustainable management that will enhance biodiversity, provide rural employment and generate additional levels of renewable resources. This council is working internally and collaboratively with partners in a number of areas including:

- replacing oil and gas boilers with woodfuel boilers in line with our Wood Fuel Policy and
- identifying and developing / letting suitable sites for wood fuel hubs on under-used county council sites
- new practices of woodland management on it's own estate with SWT and projects such as Living Woodlands to re-establish coppice management, including at Norbury Park
- advising other private owners/managers of woodlands,

Key partners in this area are the, Surrey Wildlife Trust, the AONB unit, woodland contractors, woodland owners, wood fuel producers alongside various council teams in the Environment and Infrastructure directorate and Property Services.

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