

29<sup>th</sup> April 2024**A Land Management Framework and Policy for Surrey County Council owned land**

Purpose of report: To seek the views of the Select Committee on the developing Land Management Framework and the new draft Land Management Policy for Surrey County Council owned land.

**Introduction:**

1. In accordance with the Council's Asset and Place Strategy (2019-2030), all Council services which utilise significant land and property-based assets are developing Asset Strategies in partnership with the Council's Land and Property teams. The purpose is to ensure that management of these assets aligns with the strategic direction of how Surrey County Council (SCC) wants to utilise its property assets. To date focus has mainly been on buildings and not land-based assets.
2. There is a pressing need to understand our land-based assets from an opportunity and income generation perspective but also from the view of risk and liabilities which in some cases are considerable. This enables informed, value for money business cases to be developed so these assets can be effectively managed, costs controlled and where appropriate, decisions can be made about how we best maximise value.
3. There is also a need to put our land-based assets in the context of wider strategies linked to our Surrey Way outcomes including, but not limited to, supporting the economy and our Climate Change Strategy which identifies the need for a land management framework.
4. The Land Management Framework and the Land Management Policy will provide the mechanisms for making evidence-based, value for money decisions on how we use and manage our land assets to best support our strategic outcomes.
5. Next steps for the development of the Framework and Policy will be for officers to incorporate feedback from the Select Committee and further internal consultation to produce a final version of the Draft Land Management Policy for consideration by Cabinet in the summer.

6. The full version of the final Draft Land Management Policy will be shared with the Greener Futures Reference Group for further consultation prior to Cabinet once internal feedback has been considered. Post Cabinet approval, the Council will then further engage with partners and key stakeholders at our key sites to get their feedback and to discuss implementation.

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<b>Background - What are the Council's land-based assets?</b>
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7. SCC owns or manages approximately 2% of Surrey's land. This is made up of:
  - Over 10,000 acres of countryside and its associated buildings
  - Over 2,500 acres of grade 3 or 4 farmland and its associated buildings
  - The Basingstoke Canal where it passes through Surrey
  - The grounds of 260 operational sites such as libraries and schools
  - Highway verges including 2 million trees
8. The Council's land-based assets have significant capital value, but they also provide:
  - Livelihoods, including 17 farm businesses and a wide range of tenancies with rural businesses, visitor economy licences and land for learning and communities.
  - A high-quality environment with over 7,000 acres designated for wildlife and 3,000 km of public rights of way.
  - Extensive environmental services such as potential flood storage, carbon sequestration, biodiversity/nature recovery, pollination and air filtration.
  - Nature recovery and biodiversity net gain contributions towards the Council's planning applications for development projects and capital programmes.

<b>What has changed?</b>
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9. As a landlord the Council has many duties it must comply with including health and safety, nature protection and laws relating to contract and tenure. These duties have extended following recent changes to the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 and the Environment Act 2021, placing a greater requirement on the Council to consider natural processes in its flood risk management and to drive, and report on, improving biodiversity.
10. The introduction of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan and the more recent Environment Act 2021 means there is more legislation that SCC and Surrey must respond to including:

- An enhanced biodiversity duty for landowners impacting how land is managed.
  - Local Nature Recovery Strategies – which designates upper tier local authorities like SCC as Responsible Authorities.
  - Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) for SCC developments
11. In addition to the above duties and responsibilities, government funding and private investment is being driven in the direction of managing land for positive environmental outcomes. Specifically, the government's new Environmental Land Management grants (the replacement for the Common Agricultural Policy) are paying for environment goods and services. The Council needs to be in a position to take advantage of these environment-based funding streams to support future sustainable management of the Estate.

<p><b>What are the key elements of the Land Management Framework and Land Management Policy?</b></p>
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12. There are many competing demands for how we use our land-based assets – including for Place, economic development, for residents, for income/capital receipts and for the environment. Some of these demands can be balanced; however, we need to ensure we are using an evidence based, transparent approach that takes into consideration policy and value for money when assessing the land-based asset for various uses.
13. The **proposed Land Management Framework** provides a structure for which decisions on how we manage our land-based assets and risks, and the best land use for each parcel of land, can be made. There are three key elements:
- An **evidence base** which allows for conditions surveys, as well as assessment of risks and liabilities and evaluation of opportunities. These would include social, economic and environmental opportunities including the potential to use our land for biodiversity net gain for our developments, mapped on GIS where appropriate. The evidence base will allow all uses and value for money to be compared as part of the decision making process
  - The draft Land Management Policy which includes a set **principles and policies** driven by the Surrey Way outcomes, SCC corporate needs (e.g. income) and environmental legislation and duties, through which land management and use will be assessed to support balanced decision making.

- A **Land Management Plan/collection of plans** which allow for the most cost-effective implementation through a place/estate-based approach.
14. **Diagram 1** shows how the Land Management Policy fits within a wider Land Management Framework approach. The Land Management Framework brings together evidence such as potential benefits from certain land uses; risk and liabilities; relevant policies and legislation and a GIS tool which maps opportunities and suggested uses.
  15. **Diagram 2** shows the three principles and ten policies set out in the Land Management Policy which goes to demonstrate the plethora of outcomes that can be achieved through how the Council manages its land. The Land Management Policy synthesises all the relevant policies and legislation into a set of high-level principles and specific policies that can be used to inform and guide decision making.
  16. **Appendix 1** is the Executive Summary from the Land Management Paper, providing additional context to diagrams 1 and 2.
  17. An interim governance arrangement has been put in place, in the form of a Land Board chaired jointly by the Director of Land and Property and the Director of Environment. The Land Board will regularly report to the Council's Asset Strategy Board, chaired by the Cabinet Member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure to facilitate Member engagement. Any decisions going to the Asset Strategy Board will first be discussed with the relevant Cabinet Members. Governance will be reviewed as part of the EIG Transformation Programme. The Land Board will inform the decision-making process for land use decisions that will be made through established governance routes.

# LAND MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK - HOW DOES IT ALL FIT TOGETHER?

**SCC Strategies**  
 Asset and Place Strategy  
 Service Needs

**Flood and Water Management Act**

**Statutory Duties under the Environment Act**

Local Nature Recovery Strategies  
 Biodiversity Duty  
 Biodiversity Net Gain

LURA relevant authorities must seek to 'further the purposes of' National Landscapes - not just 'have regard to'

Natural Capital **LAND MANAGEMENT POLICY** (in draft)

Aim: To translate Statutory Duties and SCC Policy into how we use and manage **all our land** to ensure implementation

SCC Natural Capital **LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Purpose: Land Management Plan for our Land Assets that delivers statutory duties, strategic need and income.

Includes:

- GIS mapping of potential uses to aid decision making
- Decision making tool to assess against all outcomes
- Framework for individual Estate plans
- Financing model to maximise inward investment

**KEY PROJECTS**

NFRM Schemes, SUDS, Adaptation

Trees, wildflower verges, urban greening

Environmental Opportunity Land Banks /insetting banks

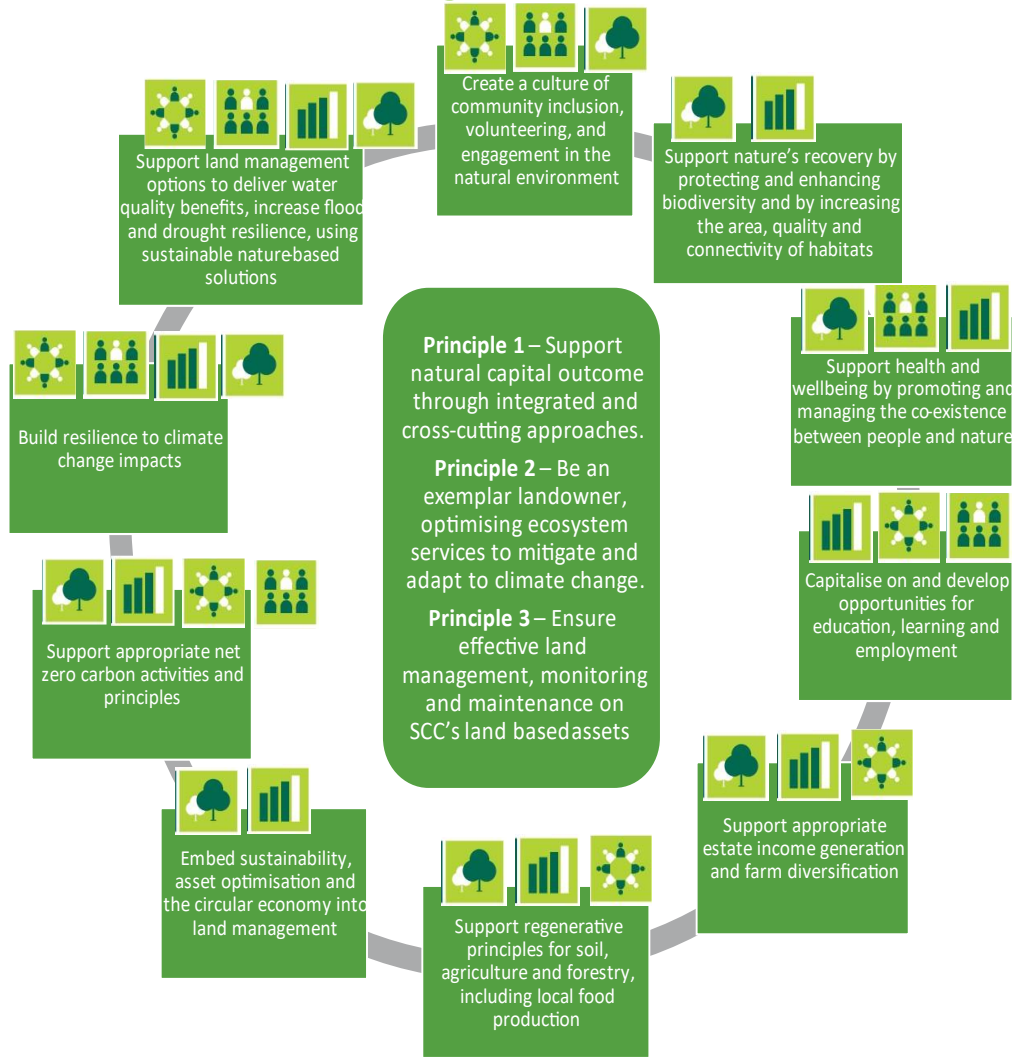
BNG/BD Strategy for SCC (land owner and developer)

BNG Strategy for Surrey

Individual Estate Plans and commercialisation of NC

Major projects and infrastructure e.g. RTS

# What is being proposed: 3 Principles and 10 Policies



Tackling health inequality	Empowering communities
Enabling a greener future	Growing a sustainable economy

**DRAFT VISION**

*“by 2050, Surrey’s land-based estate will be thriving. The Council’s ambition is to act more dynamically to ensure the future sustainability of our land based assets, both financial and environmental, through embedding nature-based solutions, community action and new technology into our land management and decision-making.*

*Our land will be more resilient to economic and environmental shocks and climate change, support growing biodiversity and have strong local community engagement and ownership. The Land Management Policy is a decision-making tool which will guide us in determining the best use of land in the right locations”*

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**Consultation - How is the Land Management Framework and Policy being developed?**

18. In January 2023 Atkins Realis were engaged to draft a Land Management Policy for the Council. As part of the policy development, they held a series of workshops to bring a group of technical officers together to review all the outcomes each service required from Council-owned land. This resulted in an agreed vision, principles and set of policies which have been further refined, prioritised and expanded by the consultants to produce a draft policy for consultation.
19. There will be further consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment and the Cabinet Member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure on the Framework and Policy. It is also proposed that further scrutiny is provided by the Committee through the Greener Futures Reference Group.
20. Other stakeholders, such as the Norbury Park Forum will be engaged as appropriate.
21. It is anticipated that a final draft will be taken to Cabinet for approval in the summer.

**Conclusions:**

22. The Council proposes to use a Land Management Policy to support decision making on the use and management of the Council's land-based assets to optimise outcomes.
23. The proposed Land Management Policy sets out a vision, three principles and ten policies which have been developed in consultation with the Council's Directorates. The proposed Policy will be delivered within the context of a Land Management Framework which facilitates a transparent and evidence-based approach to value for money, business case development and investment planning.

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24. If approved by the Cabinet, it is proposed that the new draft Land Management Policy will be published to gather further feedback from key stakeholders for a period of ten weeks.

**Recommendations:**

25. That the views of the Select Committee on the Council's new draft Land Management Policy, including the Land Management Framework, be provided in advance of Cabinet considering this matter.

**Next steps:**

26. Officers will bring together key points from the Select Committee and internal consultation to produce a final version of the Draft Land Management Policy for consideration by Cabinet.
27. The full version of the Draft Land Management Policy will be shared with the Greener Futures Reference Group for further consultation once internal feedback has been considered and incorporated where appropriate.
28. Further engagement will be undertaken with key partners and stakeholders at SCC's key sites. As specified if the draft is approved by Cabinet a 10 week consultation period will begin for key stakeholders to provide feedback.
29. The results of the consultation and any recommended changes to the policy will then be brought back to Cabinet in the Autumn if needed.

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**Report contact**

[Carolyn McKenzie – Director for Environment]

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### Contact details

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### Sources/background paper

Appendix 1: Executive Summary from Land Management Policy

## Appendix 1

### Executive Summary

Surrey enjoys a unique location in the south-east of England. The environment in Surrey must fulfil a number of diverse aims, which often need to be carefully balanced against one another – such as providing a suitable place to live and work, with healthy communities and a thriving economy. This is all against a background of a destabilising global climate and ecological decline. The land within Surrey County Council's (the Council's) estate equates to almost 2% of Surrey. It has the potential to provide multiple outcomes and benefits to the residents of Surrey, including

- leisure and recreation, mental and physical health, sequestering carbon, buffering against the impacts of climate change, supporting biodiversity, locally produced food and forestry, and provision of drinking water and clean air.

Much of the land within the Council's estate falls within a range of both statutory and non-statutory protections (such as Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Special Scientific Interest or Sites of Nature Conservation Importance) and designations (such as green belt). Despite these protections, the environment is under threat, particularly through development causing habitat loss, fragmentation, pollution, climate change

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and the use of chemicals in land management. . While the Council declared a climate change emergency in 2020 and has since then undertaken a range of initiatives and set targets against which to measure progress, it recognises that more needs to be done to align future investment and decision taking alongside sustainable, comprehensive solutions, to manage its land sustainably for nature and climate change, and to ensure multiple outcomes are delivered through integrated management approaches.

The Council have therefore set itself an ambitious vision for its countryside and open spaces –

*“by 2050, Surrey’s land-based estate will be **thriving and delivering multiple outcomes.**”*

*The Council’s ambition is to act more dynamically to embed nature-based solutions, community action and technological progress alongside new financial instruments into land management and decision-making. It will be more resilient and adaptable to climate change impacts, be net zero and have a strong local community with growing biodiversity. Its land will provide a range of opportunities, including sustainable food production, opportunities for education, training, and employment, a strong and diversified rural economy, plus be used for various types of sustainable leisure activities, which contributes to health and wellbeing.”*

In Surrey land is scarce and commands a high value. This report has been prepared to maximise opportunities arising from the values of Surrey County Council’s estate, helping the Council to use its land in a more sustainable, considered way regarding land use, management, or investments. This policy blueprint is for concerted, integrated action, which will not only help to meet a range of corporate and local priorities, but ensure that the Council is acting diligently and responsibly, effectively using the land and tools at their disposal to deliver all four pillars of the Council’s ambitions set out in the Surrey Way. In devising this policy, and associated overarching principles, the Council are seeking to establish themselves as an exemplar landowner and local authority, establishing a ‘gold benchmark’ for themselves by which others strive towards and learn from in the future.

The report provides an integrated suite of overarching principles and practical policies to ensure that the Council’s estate is used and managed effectively in response to climate change and natural challenges.





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Summary of Principles and Policies

The principles, shown below as mapped against the Surrey Way objectives are:

Land Management Principles	The Surrey Way Objectives				
	Enabling a greener future 	Growing a sustainable economy 	Tackling health inequality 	Empowering communities 	
1. Prioritise and embed the value of the Council's natural capital outcomes through integrated and cross-cutting approaches to decision making and value for money	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
2. To become an exemplar landowner, optimising ecosystem services to support Council objectives whilst adapting and mitigating to climate change	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
3. To demonstrate effective and responsible land management and maintenance, maximising the land resources available.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

The policies are copied below and also contained in the report in blue highlighted boxes with the accompanying background, context and justification.

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**Policy 1 – Support nature’s recovery by protecting and enhancing biodiversity and by increasing the area, quality, and connectivity of habitats.**

Protection and enhancement of biodiversity is advocated; this biodiversity is vital for people’s health and wellbeing, as well as supporting a range of ecosystem services. Biodiversity will be integrated holistically across all projects on the Council’s estate, including climate mitigation and adaptation, farm management and landscape works.

Natural habitats on the estate will be protected and enhanced, and opportunities taken to increase and improve connectivity between them.

For the Council’s own schemes, appropriate opportunities for delivering Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) through habitat creation and enhancement will be considered. Suitable nature-based solutions and multi-functional land uses will be prioritised that create, enhance, and connect habitats.

All land management decisions must consider the protection and enhancement of biodiversity and impacts on Biodiversity Opportunity Areas and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy<sup>1</sup> ensuring that the right habitats are created or enhanced in the right areas.

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<sup>1</sup> [Local Nature Recovery Strategy \(LNRS\) - Surrey County Council \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](https://www.surreycc.gov.uk)

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**Policy 2 – Support health and wellbeing by promoting and managing the co-existence between people and nature.**

**Access for All**

The benefits of connecting people with nature are advocated, as access and engagement with nature are shown to improve health and well-being. The Council will, where appropriate, protect and maintain existing public access provision, support new suitable public access and create, enhance or integrate suitable opportunities for people to access nature. Projects should incorporate inclusive designs and principles including for under-represented groups. This is subject to: The avoidance or management of existing or new impacts – including climate related - on sensitive sites, species, or receptors.

Suitable management of visitors – such as visitor levels, parking, and information provision.

The optimum project location, so the type and level of access is always appropriate to its location.

Screening for climate risk to avoid increased exposure, risk or impacts on assets.

Suitable projects will be supported which connect communities with the environment including opportunities for those most in need, working towards equity of access. The requirements in the Least Restrictive Access<sup>1</sup> standard (or an equivalent policy) will be considered to help reconcile the needs and benefits of access with resource protection.

When considering access and connectivity, the potential for natural capital benefits should be included – e.g. those that support biodiversity, use sustainable materials or educational benefit.

**Visitor Management**

The level of public access must always be appropriate to the site concerned, and the Council will regularly review visitor numbers, where known, and other impacts in liaison with users and stakeholders to carefully plan for new or improved access. This includes provision of new or improved sites and related work such as footpath or parking provision. Opportunities will be taken to displace visitors from overused sites to other areas promoting the rights of way network and using diversification of farms to do this (Policy 4).

In some circumstances, restrictions may be required to displace visitors or limit site access to help mitigate impacts or protect it, including temporary restrictions. These will be targeted to protect the most sensitive locations and where visitor numbers are highest. For example, the Council will explore the use of annual dog monitoring at key locations e.g., honeypot sites.

**Tools and Enablers for Visitor Management**

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A range of tools will be utilised to connect communities with nature or to direct visitors towards or away from a given site – such as the level of parking, public rights of way, appropriate signage, fencing or landscape, plus interpretation and guidance information, harnessed by on-line resources. All street furniture, surfacing materials, signage, or interpretation must be appropriate to the site concerned, suitable to its context and follow brand guidelines.

Linking with the Local Transport Plan, sustainable modes of access / travel will be promoted.

Where possible decisions on new projects will be based on evidence – for example stakeholder requests, feedback, levels of impact or target groups benefitting.

Suitable communications will be provided which improve understanding and increase the carrying capacity of sites, promote the Countryside Code and the use of public rights of way.

**Policy 3 – Capitalise on and develop opportunities for education, learning and employment.**

The Council will continue to support projects that enhance or integrate opportunities for people to benefit from education, training and employment schemes linked to its estate. These should be suitable for, sensitive and responsive to their location. Such projects will incorporate suitable inclusive designs and inclusive principles, especially under-represented groups.

Low-impact employment opportunities and ‘green jobs’ linked to its land will be encouraged and supported, such as recreational use, farming, food, estate management, maintenance, or conservation projects. The use of existing buildings on the estate for suitable employment or low impact economic opportunities is supported, such as use for businesses, workshops, studios, farm diversification, or for education / training use.

Traditional crafts linked to opportunities for training and employment are supported, especially for those less connected to the labour market, for example sawmills, YOT and sustainable local food education at farms.

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#### **Policy 4 – Support income generation and farm diversification.**

Suitable income generation and diversification projects will be supported on the Council’s estate that:

- Contribute to the local / rural economy, supports opportunities for local businesses, and ensures income generation which is sensitive and appropriate to the area.
- Act as community hubs offering opportunities for health and wellbeing benefits (Policy 2), and education, learning and employment (Policy 3).
- Enhance nature and provide opportunities for visitors to connect with nature (rather than provide ‘entertainment’).
- Contribute to the circular economy.
- Promote suitable habitat creation and enhancement.
- Meets other key natural capital objectives such as net zero, climate mitigation and adaptation, renewable energy, timber, or local food supply.

The Council will encourage farms to diversify in a way which is commensurate with their supply chains, provides a local food or other offer to residents and supports local business.

Each new project on the Council’s estate will consider how suitable income generation opportunities could be provided, alongside other opportunities reflecting the multifunctional use of land, such improving biodiversity, climate mitigation and adaptation. Income generation should be carefully balanced with these other aspects to ensure any trade-offs are managed, and potential co-benefits and synergies are promoted.

Proactive steps will be taken to explore how projects designed to deliver environmental outcomes could provide revenue e.g., from BNG or carbon credits to provide complementary funding streams for projects.

#### **Data management and governance**

All tenant farms will have Integrated Farm Plans (IFPs) within 10 years following introduction of ELMS. IFPs will have consistent and measurable KPIs and regular reporting so the performance can be monitored, and the metrics aggregated to determine results.

A baseline will be developed of microeconomic information about each farm to ensure realistic KPIs can be set to support the IFPs. This information should be incorporated and managed in the Council’s interactive and spatial natural capital account platform.

#### **Specific Events**

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Events, activities, and filming in the countryside offer opportunities for people to visit and engage with open spaces, benefit the rural economy and generate an income. Events can sometimes have negative impacts upon the environment if not carefully managed. Each request for events will be considered, in liaison with partners if needed (such as Natural England or Surrey Wildlife Trust), on a case-by-case basis including the nature of the proposal, its scale, location, impacts, benefits, and mitigation or restoration measures.

**Policy 5 – Support regenerative principles for soil, agriculture, forestry and local food.**

The Council will work in partnership with farm tenants and others to:

- Develop and support suitable projects which improve the quality of natural assets and their ability to provide healthy food, nature, air, water and soil.
- To raise awareness of and encourage farms to apply regenerative farming practices, especially in new tenancies.
- Produce healthy food and forestry products consistent with the principles of regenerative agriculture, agroforestry, and sustainable forestry (Policy 4 – farm diversification).
- Increase biodiversity, carbon sequestration and other ecosystem services such as water quality, flood management (Policies 1 biodiversity and 7 climate change).
- Providing viable farming livelihoods for tenants which are appropriate to the land holding and its natural characteristics.

The Council will collaborate with tenants to develop and maintain Integrated Farm Plans, to identify opportunities for new income streams from ELMS, other ecosystem or conventional markets for food or recreation. Where appropriate, the Council will explore the opportunity to develop demonstration farms on its estate to provide the catalyst for wider, positive change.

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**Policy 6 – Embed sustainability, asset optimisation and circular economy principles into land management.**

**Sustainability and Asset maximisation**

Sustainability and asset maximisation, including resources derived from land, multi-use land and natural assets will be supported in decision making about land management.

Suitable projects will be considered which increase biodiversity, carbon sequestration, climate adaptation, natural flood management, the circular economy, or other key priorities.

The benefits from co-locating uses, integrating projects, or sharing facilities are supported.

Potential projects will be considered on a case-by-case basis, including:

- The effective management of impacts on sensitive sites, species, or receptors.
- Consideration of the optimum location, so the use or activity proposed is always appropriate for that site.
- Opportunities for community development or inclusion.

**Circular Economy**

The benefits of resource maximisation and the circular economy are advocated, including sustainable waste management, waste reduction, reuse, recycling, plus products and materials with preferred life-cycle impacts.

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**Policy 7 – Build resilience to climate change impacts, invasive species, and diseases.**

The principles and benefits of climate change resilience are advocated. The Council supports appropriate projects on its estate which create, enhance, or integrate opportunities which help adapt to the impacts of climate change and build resilience.

Positive consideration will be given to utilising suitable natural capital assets and nature-based solutions for building climate adaptation and resilience. The Council's estate will be used for a range of appropriate adaptation and resilience projects, such as tree planting to create canopy cover for shading, natural flood management (NFM) and sustainable drainage systems (SuDS).

Climate adaptation and resilience will be championed alongside climate mitigation in all land management projects. Resilient landscapes will be achieved through careful siting, design and species mixes to ensure carbon, water and biodiversity benefits, and to help prevent invasive species and diseases.

Climate resilience features and ecosystem services that promote resilience should be captured appropriately in business cases for schemes.

The Council will ensure land use and management decisions are aligned with the Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience Action Plan (once adopted), the Flood Risk Management Strategy and with key partners, including the Catchment Partnerships.

The Council supports and promotes initiatives which avoid the introduction of, reduce the impacts of and undertake the effective control of pests, invasive species, and diseases.

The Council advocate a programme of managing, monitoring, and maintaining its natural assets to protect them from pests, disease and invasive species.

**Policy 8 – Prioritise land management options to deliver water quality benefits, improve flood and drought resilience, using sustainable nature-based solutions.**

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All land management decisions should consider their potential impacts on flood risk, drought resilience and water quality, both on the Council's estate and receiving watercourses. Appropriate measures with greatest potential to improve these benefits will be prioritised and implemented at appropriate locations.

- A catchment-based approach will be taken to identifying opportunities within the Council's estate to influence downstream flood risk, improve resilience, drought, and water quality. Land management options and sustainable nature-based solutions (i.e., NFM and SuDS), informed by the catchment-based approach will be considered. Where the Council is seeking to use its land is to be used to combat flooding, wider benefits will be promoted including habitat regeneration, biodiversity, and wellbeing. This will be part of a spatial, strategic, evidence-based activity, integrated to the natural capital account of its estate, opportunity mapping, and spatial climate risks and vulnerabilities assessment.
- Partnership work with water suppliers and others will be undertaken to reduce water use and abstractions and promote water storage through nature-based solutions and appropriate agricultural techniques such as soil water storage. Such partnership work will be used to promote the use of catchment solutions (e.g., cover cropping) to reduce nutrient, sediment, and pesticide runoff.
- The multiple benefits of catchment measures and nature-based solutions will be estimated and reported using best available tools and methodologies to support business cases.
- Sensitive and safe recreational uses of its watercourses and waterbodies will be promoted where these are suitable and publicly accessible, working with other landowners and water companies to improve water quality.

**Policy 9 – Support appropriate net zero carbon principles and activities.**

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The Council champion climate mitigation and adaptation in partnership with stakeholders. Net zero outcomes will be prioritised particularly those which quantify emissions, or sequestration benefits, which should be captured in business cases.

A strategic, evidence-based approach will be taken to planning and delivery of Net Zero outcomes and projects. The Council will undertake regular natural capital accounting for its estate and use a spatial opportunity mapping approach to identify suitable locations for renewable energy and nature-based solutions for carbon sequestration or changes to agricultural. This will be considered alongside nature recovery, biodiversity enhancement, and a climate risks and vulnerabilities assessment.

The estate will be used to deliver woodland management, tree planting and hedgerow creation, informed by the evidence-based, opportunity mapping. The focus will be broadened from sequestration via tree planting to include other suitable habitat restoration and creation, such as 'natural regeneration' (i.e., modifying agricultural management), climate smart agriculture, wetland creation and renewable energy projects.

All projects must be aligned with the Greener Futures Climate Change Delivery Plan and the Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience Action Plan (once produced).

Funding or investment for carbon sequestration, emissions reductions, and renewable energy will be investigated, such as carbon credits or engaging with stakeholders for joint opportunities.

**Monitoring and verification**

Project and land management decisions will be aligned and compliant with greenhouse gas reduction and sequestration standards, including the best available modelling techniques. A whole lifecycle carbon approach will be used to build evidence for embodied and operational emissions. Changes in emissions and sequestration from its estate will be tracked and reported in alignment with the definitions outlined in the Greenhouse Gas Protocol.

**Policy 10 – Create a culture of community inclusion, volunteering, and engagement in the natural environment.**

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Appropriate community empowerment, development and volunteering activities linked to or resulting from the Council's estate will be supported, including suitable new or improved community facilities.

Projects will be prioritised which support communities or facilitate positive environmental outcomes (such as woodland management or green space enhancement) plus those which integrate opportunities for education, learning or employment.

The Council seek to ensure community and volunteering projects become more diverse, focusing on groups or areas who may currently be under-represented through measures such as targeted funding, improving accessibility or transport. The local community or other stakeholders will be engaged where possible as part of the decision-making process for new projects.

The estate will be used to provide opportunities for visitors to give back and contribute towards the quality of their experience through giving their time, money, or expertise.

The Council seek to provide opportunities for all, including for those who are disabled at various locations offering different experiences (views, sensory, waterside, and woodland). The Council will seek to create opportunities which support groups unable to access the countryside to connect with it, for examples VR in care homes, transport from Spelthorne, new green areas in River Thames Scheme.

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