

Speech for the Petition – Presented by Sally Blake on 2 February 2016

Change.org – Keep Newlands Corner family-friendly and free to access

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I'm speaking on behalf of Richard Harrold who started the petition about Newlands Corner and 8,800 others.

We want to make the Cabinet aware of the reasons for the massive opposition to Surrey County Council's proposals, from the vast majority of those who currently visit and enjoy the site.

First, parking charges are not acceptable.

Your report says there are 550,000 visitors a year. Many of these can't afford parking charges and will stop coming - at a time when government is encouraging healthy exercise.

And there's no public transport to this site.

Second, a commercial development with a coach park, huge café, shop and visitor centre, is not acceptable.

It would change the unspoiled nature and sense of community of Newlands Corner which are its particular attractions.

Building across the view would be as bad as vandalism.

There is already an outdoor café, toilet block and visitor centre on site, and an indoor café 50 yards away!

Third, we believe it's wrong to spend £400,000 of taxpayers' money on non-essential works, in this time of austerity.

Little upgrade is needed to the toilets, with minimal cost.

A play trail is not needed, as the environment is already a natural playground.

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Newlands Corner topped Guildford Borough Council's assessment of Accessible Natural and Semi Natural Greenspace with a score of 70% for quality and facilities.

Fourth, we believe that, without the parking charges and development, the ongoing maintenance of Newlands Corner will cost very little - and could be met from other sources which Surrey County Council has not explored.

We believe that visitor numbers, road safety, ancient yews, protected species, archaeology and costs have not been looked at sufficiently, if at all.

We believe the wording of Cabinet's approval on 27 October 2015 to the parking charges and use of funds raised is incorrect and misleading.

We believe notice of changes has been posted before approval from relevant bodies has even been requested.

And Surrey County Council has failed to provide any answers to Freedom of Information requests made on 17 December 2015.

We call on Surrey County Council to drop all its current proposals on Newlands Corner.

It is a free, unspoiled, iconic space that so many people enjoy.

Please keep it that way.

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