

Save Newlands Corner

Summary of the Situation at Newlands Corner

This information sheet is compiled from website sources, emails/printed papers and conversations. Please read it with caution - there may be material we have not seen or unpublicised changes.

The Proposals

Originally, Surrey County Council (SCC) had a two-phase plan, as below. It now appears to have abandoned the use of the term 'phase'. But it hasn't abandoned any of its proposals.

Phase 1 proposals

- **Refurbish the toilets** – everyone agrees that this is needed.
- **Upgrade the all-access trail** for people with disabilities and children's pushchairs – this needs to be done to undo Surrey Wildlife Trust's failure to maintain the site, but in a way sensitive to Newlands Corner's natural environment.
- **Introduce a play trail with up to ten large, very costly (over £200,000), artificial play structures**, extending over 2 acres of land – but see below. We believe these large, artificial structures would have no place at Newlands Corner.
- **Introduce parking charges**, once the above were finished. We say, **this is a tax on the countryside**. Newlands Corner should be free-to-access for all.

Phase 2 proposals

- **Replace the existing, much-loved café with a large building** – a café, visitors centre and "retail space". SCC is downplaying this by saying it has no plans for this. But see below.-
- **Install a coach park.**

Parking Charges

Facts:

- SCC said it would introduce parking charges once the Phase 1 proposals, for a play trail and upgrade to the toilets, were completed. It has now gone back on this and will be introducing car parking charges first, if it holds to its intention to introduce charges "over the summer" ..
- Charges will apply 24 hours a day - first 20 minutes free if you leave within 20 minutes, each hour £1, maximum £4 a day; annual season ticket £40 a year; and they will be reviewed annually. A Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) feasibility report suggests large increases could be in the pipeline in the first few years.
- 'Blue badge' holders - no charge. Motorbike owners will be charged, if parked in a car space for more than 20 minutes, but free if they park in the bike area.
- Long-term, there would possibly be a coach park. There is no indication of what the charges, if any, would be.
- SCC says charges will compare favourably with other places.
- SCC initially said that 122,000 vehicles visit the site each year. It built its Phase 1 business case around this. The actual figure is 255,000 vehicles a year. Charges could be half of what is proposed to achieve the same income.
- SCC says it will encourage vehicle numbers to rise to 365,000 vehicles within four years - even greater beyond that.
- Charges are likely to deter many visitors, including those with modest means, who SCC purports to want to help.
- Albury Estate (see below) gets 25% of any net income from the site. This will include parking charge income. Cllr Goodman said, "it will not be 25%". He would not say what it might be.
- SCC will have to include 20% VAT in the parking charge, payable to Customs and Excise.
- SCC says it will cost an additional £59,000 a year to manage the car parking charges.
- **On 16 February 2017, the Planning Inspectorate approved SCC's application to put parking charge equipment on the site despite 1,400 objections.** The recently-released SWT Business Plan says they will be introduced "in the summer".

Save Newlands Corner Concerns/Views:

- **Newlands Corner should remain free-to-access.**
- Albury Estate is a business and would surely not agree to a reduction in the percentage unless something else was on the table. If Albury Estate does have a motive for reducing the percentage, we are not being told what it is.
- Encouraging the number of vehicles to rise to 365,000 vehicle visits a year, and beyond, increases the need to have a reconfigured road layout at the Newlands Corner/Trodds Lane/A25 junctions – see also 'Coach parking' below.
- SCC says it has "no plans" to change the car park. Plans to "restructure" it are on hold. The increased vehicle numbers planned by SCC cannot fit into the current car park. Is SCC just saying this to get its planning applications through?
- Charges will hit people on low incomes who find it increasingly difficult to afford access to their heritage. This is a new tax, particularly on the Guildford area, and especially on low-income people not currently paying income tax or council tax. SCC says it will monitor this, giving no details as to how such monitoring will take place or what it will do.
- There are no guarantees that the charges will remain the same. A feasibility study for the project seems to herald very large increases, once the initial arrangements (parking charges and play structures) "settle".
- Some might be encouraged into the countryside by the changes: others (dog walkers, elderly who sit in their cars & enjoy the view, etc) would be deterred. This changes the users from non-spenders to spenders.
- The Business Plan states "A Business Case is to be made to evaluate the introduction of vehicle charging at the most used car parks on the Estate." As we have always warned, Newlands Corner is the "trailblazer" for other sites.

- Comparison with other sites is irrelevant. Charges should generate only what is needed to maintain Newlands Corner.
- Proposals for charging horse box owners are very woolly – SCC doesn't seem to quite know what to do about them.

Play Structures

Facts:

- The existing, and neglected, all-ability path through the woodland will be 'upgraded' and turned into a 'Family Play Trail'. It was originally intended to introduce ten large, artificial play structures. It then seemed to be reduced to seven. However, dormouse activity has meant that SCC has had to curtail its aspirations to five structures.
- At a public meeting on 9 March 2016, 99% of approx. 250 attendees rejected the idea of any artificial play structures.
- SCC says the play trail and structures would stretch over two acres of land.
- SCC says the structures are being proposed to encourage more people into the countryside for wellbeing purposes.
- SCC submitted an application to the Planning Inspectorate on 30 May 2017 seeking permission to erect six play structures on the site (one to replace the one near the café). The Inspectorate says the number of objections is just under 1,100 and is "unprecedented".

Save Newlands Corner Concerns/Views:

- No one has asked for these play structures. There are plenty of other facilities in the area which have structures of this type. **Newlands Corner is a natural playground in itself and should stay as it is.** Children do not need such 'attractions' to enjoy the natural environment at Newlands Corner.
- The feasibility study said charges would not be viable without the structures: the real reason for their introduction. People are being deliberately tempted by the play park atmosphere to maximise the income from parking.
- There should be no play structures at all as they would be used to justify further development.
- The destruction of natural habitat which is home to protected species, including the hazel dormouse and Roman snail. In particular, the Ancient Yew Group and the Tree Register have come out strongly against the proposals as they are a threat to the ancient yews at Newlands corner and are nationally and internationally important.
- The turning of a natural environment into an urban-style play park.
- The concentration of children into small areas would cause disturbance to wildlife and spoil visitors' quiet enjoyment of the site. This trail is the only place where people with walking difficulties, who cannot manage other trails, can truly find such enjoyment at Newlands Corner – "quiet enjoyment" being one of the main purposes of AONB status.
- Having established the principle with some play structures, it is feasible this number could grow with future expansion.
- SCC has provided no evidence that play structures would encourage more people to enjoy the countryside. A counter-argument is that play structures might make the countryside seem boring.

New Building

Facts:

- A new building has been put on hold, but the situation will be reviewed if SCC succeeds in putting the parking charges and play structures in place. The original drawing shows it sitting on the edge of the hill, at least four times the size of the present building. SCC has said that this is not going to be its position. We were told that architects were drawing up possibilities showing one option roughly on the site of the present building and "two forward positions". The architects would only produce drawings from instructions supplied by SCC.
- Any building is likely to have an "improved" visitor centre and indoor café, an external serving point, and "retail space"
- No costs/funding have been agreed by SCC as the business case has not been put to the SCC Cabinet. SCC says it currently has "no plans" for a building. However, Cllr Goodman said on 27 March 2017 that he could not rule out revisiting this proposal in the next five years. So, the proposal has not gone away.
- Any approved structure at Newlands Corner becomes an asset of Albury Estate by default as the landowner.
- We understand that Albury Estate would lease any building to SCC; the construction of which will be paid by SCC.
- In the interim, SCC is talking, in vague terms, about café seating in the visitors' centre and extending the canopy.

Save Newlands Corner Concerns/Views:

- The building would require the clearance of hundreds (thousands?) of square metres of wild land – notably trees.
- There is no call for a new building. The present café is much-loved, and all that is needed, by virtually all visitors.
- It would be used to attract people to spend more on the café, shop and car park, rather than allowing them to freely enjoy the countryside.
- The building would, from the other side of the valley, be a blot on the skyline that others would not be allowed to introduce in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Even if built into the hill, it would still be visible and inappropriate.
- A new building, if built, would set a precedent, allowing other developers to move in and further spoil the area.
- What would happen to the old building, if its location was not used for the new building? Further commercialisation?
- We welcome the proposed arrangements for the existing café – but as the only option.

Coach Parking

Facts:

- The concept proposal shows the introduction of coach parking for the first time.
- A coach park would need to be accommodated, as would a turning area. Nothing is finalised about its size, but it would require additional natural land to be used, unless car parking spaces are removed (very unlikely).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The road would need to accommodate slow-maneuvring coaches turning into, and exiting from, the site. SCC, discounting fundamental changes, has recently introduced a 40mph speed limit and traffic calming measures. There have been two deaths on this stretch of road since.
<p>Save Newlands Corner Concerns/Views:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a serious safety issue. The site's entrance has always been a risk for drivers entering and leaving the site, particularly those turning right into it. With large, slow-moving coaches and HGVs (during any months of construction work), the risk is much-increased. The number of vehicles visiting the site would jump to 365,000 (which is 730,000 movements onto and off the site), greatly increasing the risk of traffic queues onto the A25. Making the North Downs Way crossing "feel safer", as SCC has said, will actually encourage pedestrian complacency – making it, potentially, more-dangerous. Cars and vans are not beautiful. But, they are low-profile. Coaches would blot out large expanses of the view – and not just across the valley, but of the trees and other wild land around the immediate area. Coach parties tend to come unprepared for a trek in the outdoors, and are not known for staying in a location for very long. This seems like an attempt by SCC to bus-in high volumes of people who are likely to use the café and shop.
<p>The Albury Estate (The Duke of Northumberland's Estate)</p>
<p>Facts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Newlands Corner is owned by the Albury Estate (i.e. the Duke of Northumberland). The Estate and Surrey County Council (SCC) signed a new Access Agreement in 1994 (amended 2007) granting public access "for the purpose of open air recreation" with SCC managing the area (but see Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) below) and paying an annual amount to the Albury Estate (2015/16 cost: £1375 per annum and £16 plus VAT per annum for the Visitor Room) - reviewed annually in December. The present Agreement remains in force until 2026. Albury Estate retained the right to manage the woodland and is responsible for conservation. SWT is only responsible for looking after access, i.e. entrance, paths, car park, toilets maintenance, visitor centre, litter removal. The Agreement sets out that any net income accruing to SCC through the public's use of Newlands Corner will be allocated 75% to SCC and 25% to Albury Estate.
<p>Save Newlands Corner Concerns/Views:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Albury Estate has not given any view on where it stands with regard to the proposals, saying that management of the site is the responsibility of SCC.- Albury Estate is due to receive a windfall, if the project goes ahead, without it doing very much – money publicly-raised that is supposed to be cutting SCC's costs. Does Albury Estate have its own commercial aspirations for the site? Why else would it agree to a lower percentage?
<p>Financing the Project/Costs</p>
<p>Facts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SCC has approved spending of £400,000 on the play trail/artificial play structures/improved toilets/ parking charges, at least 50% of which is on the play structures. The Business Case was based on 122,000 vehicles visiting the site each year. We now know that this is 255,000 vehicles. The Business Case was, therefore, incorrect. The Council Leader, rather than expressing concern about this, said that "The new data appears to me to strengthen the business case". Funding the new building/coach parking has not been approved. A Business Case has yet to be put to the SCC Cabinet. SCC originally said that <u>future</u> costs would be £157,000 a year. Following months of pressure by campaigners it has provided figures which indicate that it is <u>current</u> costs that are £157,000 and that these would rise to around £319,000 a year following the introduction of the Phase 1 proposals. Just managing the charging scheme would cost £59,000. All net income from parking charges will go to SWT. Penalty charges will go to a commercial contractor.
<p>Save Newlands Corner Concerns/Views:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Despite SCC's immediate need to economise, the project would entail significant spending on non-statutory work at a time when other statutory services, particularly Adult Social Care, are under huge strain. The actual vehicle figures provide the opportunity to reduce the proposed parking charges to achieve the originally-targeted amount of income. Instead, the Council Leader seems happy for the public to be overcharged. In other words, this is a general tax, on mainly Guildford area residents, on visiting the countryside. Much of the project, if it goes ahead, would be financed by the public through charges (not a saving to the public, as SCC says). Albury Estate would receive up to 25% of the income from SCC's investment and a new building. Once Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) collects enough money for all of its responsibilities what will happen to any excess income? If there is a profit, it means that there will be a loss from the public purse to SWT. Or will SCC claw it back? Based upon the latest cost figures we have from SCC, it would seem that SCC and SWT would find it difficult to break even without raising parking charges quickly and significantly. The current and future management costs quoted by SCC look extremely high; they probably include huge overheads. Excess car parking charges would be used to run other SCC countryside sites in Surrey, other than Newlands Corner, even though local people (around Guildford) would be paying most of the charges.
<p>Surrey Wildlife Trust</p>
<p>Facts:</p>

- Since 2002, Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) has had an agreement with, and been paid by, SCC to manage the SCC Countryside Estate, including access to the Newlands Corner site (and it manages conservation in 50 other SCC sites).
- Due to local authority cutbacks, SWT has to bear the full burden of the cost of the SCC Countryside Estate by 2021, a phased reduction of about £1million a year.
- The SCC Cabinet tasked Cllr Goodman, lead councillor for the project, to complete negotiations with SWT on changing the agreement in the light of the proposals for Newlands Corner and any other changes in the management of the Countryside Estate. The Cabinet has agreed the changes and a Business Plan.
- SWT says it is “passionately protecting and restoring wildlife habitats, both in the countryside and urban green spaces”
- One councillor has said “The impression I get is that SWT are not that good at business plans”.
- SWT has been collaborating with SCC for at least three years on these proposals.
- SWT made all of its countryside rangers redundant in 2017, and has only re-employed two of them in ten new roles.

Save Newlands Corner Concerns/Views:

- SWT appears to be compromising its principles and aims in order to cover the withdrawal of funding by SCC. Is this what the volunteer membership signed up to?
- 14 rangers moving away from SWT is a very significant loss of knowledge and experience. We have received reports that volunteers are moving to other charities. Apart from the rangers, the other victim is the Surrey countryside.
- SWT (with SCC and Albury Estate) is prepared to use and spoil Newlands Corner, due to its position and popularity, to help cover the cost of maintaining the whole SCC Countryside Estate. Newlands Corner’s costs would rise significantly, to around £319,000. Using the proposed scale of parking charges, there would be little or no money left over, after paying for Newlands Corner. This strengthens the case for a ‘Friends of Newlands Corner’ to take over management of the site (see below). Alternatively, it gives SWT and SCC a case for increasing the parking charges quickly.

Consultation/Public Meetings

Facts:

- There has been no public consultation prior to these proposals being put forward.
- Following public pressure, two drop-in sessions at Albury and Merrow were announced by the SCC Cabinet on 2 February 2016. The Albury meeting was scheduled for just seven days later. Even so, 80 people attended. The Merrow drop-in took place on 24 February 2016. Around 200 people attended, following publicity by campaigners.
- Further pressure resulted in a public meeting on 9 March 2016 at Holy Trinity Church, Guildford. On a night of truly terrible weather, around 250 people attended. The audience was outraged and frustrated at the proposals themselves, the panel’s failure to answer any questions properly and the meeting’s appalling organisation.
- Only one ‘member of the public’ spoke in favour of the proposals - a Surrey Heath Councillor who did not declare his position and who is a close associate of Cllr Goodman. Nor did Cllr Goodman tell the audience of his knowledge of this.

Save Newlands Corner Concerns/Views:

- SCC is attempting to introduce the proposals without proper consultation.
- Meetings were hastily arranged, with little time for the public to find out about them, and poorly advertised.
- We have said consistently that SCC would use the existence of the meetings, no matter how badly arranged or notified to say consultation has taken place. This is now the case. It is not consultation. The overwhelming public view has been to keep Newlands Corner as it is – open and natural and free to access. SCC is not responding to this.
- Why did a Surrey Heath councillor attend the meeting, speak out strongly in favour of the proposals and not identify himself (or was not identified by Cllr Goodman) as a councillor at the meeting?

Friends of Newlands Corner

- The Save Newlands Corner Campaign Group has put forward an outline proposal to SCC for the setting up of a charitable trust called ‘Friends of Newlands Corner’. This would take over management of Newlands Corner from SCC and SWT. The proposal can be found on the main website, www.savenewlandscorner.com – look under Archives May 2016. SCC has said it is a good idea – but only to support its management of the site with extra funding and volunteers, and it would still want to introduce parking charges and play structures – an absurd suggestion since the ‘Friends’ proposal is to avoid these. If SCC does decide that a ‘Friends’ could take over the management, the proposal will be back on the table. This is unlikely to happen as the parking charge money is SCC’s prime consideration.

Useful web addresses

- www.savenewlandscorner.com - This is our website. Please see the post ‘[How Can You Help the Campaign](#)’ advising you who to write to – even if you live outside Surrey. You can also register for updates.
- www.surreycc.gov.uk/environment-housing-and-planning/countryside/explore-surreys-countryside/improvements-to-newlands-corner - SCC’s proposals
- https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/131884/SWT-Countryside-Estate-Business-Plan-07-06-17-FINAL.pdf - SCC’s Business plan for the Countryside Estate

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