

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 has 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-ability 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 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, visitor centre and "retail space" and install a coach park. SCC is downplaying this by saying it has no plans for this. But see below.

Parking Charges

Facts:

- SCC said charges would be imposed once the Phase 1 proposals were completed. It has gone back on this and is introducing charges first. SCC says charges will be introduced by the end of July 2018 (at Newlands Corner and 15 other car parks in the SCC Countryside Estate). Work started on 12 April 2018 with the insertion of 400 new and replacement wooden bollards into the common to stop people avoiding the charges by parking on the verges.
- Charges will apply 24 hours a day - first 20 minutes free, if you leave within 20 minutes, each hour £1.30, maximum £5 a day; annual season ticket £60 a year; and they will be reviewed annually. These charges have already been increased substantially from the original proposal. Horseboxes and minibuses will be charged £6 per visit. A Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) report suggests there could be further, large increases in the first few years.
- 'Blue badge' holders - no charge. Motorbike owners will not be charged if they park in the bike area, but they will be charged if parked in a car space for more than 20 minutes.
- 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 wanted to encourage vehicle numbers to rise to 365,000 vehicles within four years of introducing play structures (but see below) - 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. Parking charges will be paid to SWT as SCC's 'agent'. The Estate has been in negotiation with SCC as to the future percentage split of parking charges.
- 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.

Save Newlands Corner Concerns/Views:

- **Newlands Corner should remain free-to-access.**
- SCC says it has "no plans" to change the car park, but it does intend to reconfigure the layout. Any plans to extend the car park will need Planning Inspectorate consent.
- The bollards are an eyesore. The duty of the Surrey Hills Board is to conserve and enhance the site's natural beauty. It has remained quiet, perhaps because SCC's Cllr Goodman, who is imposing the charging scheme, is on the Board.
- SCC has not applied to the Planning Inspectorate for consent for any of the wooden bollards under s.38 of the Commons Act 2006. Only one line of up to 200 metres of bollards is permitted without consent.
- The bollards are dangerous, on an already very dangerous road, with insufficient reflectors, and not fitted in a material with 'give' as they should have been.
- 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 "settle".

- Some might be encouraged into the countryside by the changes: others (low-income groups, 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 stated “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. SCC has now decided to introduce charges at five other site (Chobham, Rodborough, Whitmoor and Ockham commons and Norbury Park), equating to 15 car parks. This was despite 75% of people in a public consultation saying they did not want charges at all. Similarly, if charges were to be introduced, the majority of people wanted a cash payment facility. If payment is only allowed by phone or card at Newlands Corner, as at these other sites, this will further-deter the elderly and low-income groups, and those who do not have or like to use such payment methods.
- Comparison with other sites is irrelevant. Charges should generate only what is needed to maintain Newlands Corner.

Play Structures

Facts:

- SCC and SWT want to ‘upgrade’ the existing, and neglected, all-ability path through the woodland and turn it into an ‘Educational Play Trail’. It was originally intended to introduce ten large, artificial play structures.
- At a public meeting on 9 March 2016, 99% of approx. 250 attendees rejected the idea of any artificial play structures.
- SCC said the play trail and structures would stretch over two acres of land.
- SCC said the structures were 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 said the number of objections was just under 1,100 and was “unprecedented”.
- Following the announcement of a public inquiry, SCC withdrew its application on 7 September 2017 on the grounds of cost of the inquiry, quoted as £30,000, but said it would revisit the idea.

Save Newlands Corner Concerns/Views:

- No one 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 proposals would turn a natural environment into an urban-style play park.
- The feasibility study said charges would not be viable without the structures: the real reason for their introduction. SCC wants to tempt people 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.
- There would be 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 came out strongly against the proposals as they are a threat to the ancient yews at Newlands Corner which are nationally and internationally important.
- 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.
- Plans to upgrade the all-ability trail seem to have been abandoned.

New Building

Facts:

- A new building has been put on hold. SCC will review the situation, if it eventually 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 says that this would not 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”.
- 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 for by SCC.
- In the interim, SCC talked, in vague terms, about café seating in the visitor centre and extending the canopy. This seems to have died a death.

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 encouraging 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 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 welcomed the now-abandoned 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).
- 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.

Save Newlands Corner Concerns/Views:

- There is a serious safety issue. Entering and leaving the site is always a risk, particularly when turning right into it. With large, slow-moving coaches and HGVs (during any months of construction work), the risk is much-increased.
- 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.

The Albury Estate (The Duke of Northumberland’s Estate)

Facts:

- Newlands Corner is owned by the Albury Estate (i.e. the Duke of Northumberland).
- The Estate and Surrey County Council (SCC) signed an updated 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/grassland 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.

Save Newlands Corner Concerns/Views:

- 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. A rumour (which SCC has failed to confirm or deny) suggests that the Estate **could take up to 50% of the net parking charges.**

Financing the Project/Costs

Facts:

- SCC originally approved spending of £400,000 on the play trail/artificial play structures/improved toilets/ parking charges. 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”.
- Since the withdrawal of the application for the play structures, SCC has reduced the approved spending to £122,000 (£47,000 car park infrastructure, £65,000 refurbishment of toilets, £10,000 contingency). Prior to that, SCC had already spent £78,000 (£39,000 new building, £34,000 play structures, £5,000 car park infrastructure) plus SCC staff costs.
- 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 future costs would be £157,000 a year. Following months of pressure, it provided figures indicating that current costs are £157,000 pa and would rise to around £319,000 pa after the introduction of the Phase 1 proposals. Just managing the charging scheme would cost £59,000 pa. We do not know what the future costs would now be, following the removal of the play structures proposal.
- All net income from parking charges will go to SWT as SCC’s agent. Who will impose penalty charges and where the money will go is not clear.

Save Newlands Corner Concerns/Views:

- Despite repeated requests, SCC has refused to release the figures underpinning the business case for Newlands Corner, saying these are ‘still in draft’. We have produced estimated figures, but SCC will not confirm these.
- The figures underpinning the next 15 car parks at Chobham, Whitmoor, Ockham, Rodborough and Norbury Park have been released. These show £448,000 pa parking income, £247,000 pa costs of running the scheme, resulting in only £201,000 pa net income (45%) This is a highly inefficient way of raising money to pay for the countryside. At Newlands

Corner, at least 25% of the net income (perhaps 50%) will also have to be paid to the Albury Estate.

- SCC has made **no allowance at all** for the increase in its adult social care and health budget (£537m) by denying those on low incomes, particularly the elderly, access to the countryside. Recent studies place a huge value on the health benefits of regular access to green space, and say it keeps people out of care homes.
- 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 parking charges (not a saving to the public, as SCC says). Albury Estate would receive significant income from SCC's "investment" and a new building.
- Once enough has been collected for SCC's Countryside Estate responsibilities, what will happen to any excess income?
- 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.
- Excessive 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.

Surrey Wildlife Trust

Facts:

- 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 (it manages conservation in the c50 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, down from 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 four years on these proposals.
- SWT made its countryside rangers redundant in 2017. It has only re-employed two in its ten new (non-ranger) 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. 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 charitable trust arrangement 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.

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/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/160078/SCC-and-SWT-Partnership-Business-Plan-March2018.pdf - SWT’s Business plan for the Countryside Estate

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