

**The Response by Surrey County Council to the Representations made to the Application for Commons Consent to Install Three Parking Meters and associated signage on Common CL344 Albury Downs, known as Newlands Corner.**

Surrey County Council (SCC) is making this application on behalf of the Albury Estate, which owns the land. It is part of a project to update the facilities for the public at Newlands Corner and to ensure those facilities can be better managed in the future. The site is well loved by the public and has attracted visitors for at least a hundred years. Currently the whole site has a public right of access on foot with public bridleway rights on horseback and bicycle. Access by motorised vehicle is by permission of the landowner except on the public byway that crosses the site. The Access Agreement between the Albury Estate and SCC was to provide facilities for the public, which include the car park, toilets, visitor room, benches and the café. These have been largely funded by SCC. Public Access to the site is managed by Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) on behalf of SCC. The subject of this application is therefore a partnership between the three parties.

Although a wider project was considered, the proposal is now to refurbish the toilets, replace benches, resurface the all ability trail in the woodlands, upgrade the children's play area behind the café, install a number of play and educational pieces in the woodland and install the infrastructure to start charging for parking. Most of these changes do not require commons consent, but the play and education pieces will be the subject of a separate application because we needed to amend the layout and liaise further with local groups following habitat and species surveys, including dormice. There are no plans to reconfigure the carpark at present although we will continue to monitor its use and assess the best way of accommodating vehicles such as horse boxes. There are also no plans to extend the carpark although it has over the last 100 years grown in size and extent. The plans for the future are to limit the impact of the car parking on the surrounding landscape. There are currently 255,000 cars using the car park per annum, this will naturally increase over time. The plan put forward to generate an income from the car park predicts an increase to 365,000 cars over the first 4 years and then a steady increase over the subsequent years of the initial 15 year business plan. This is based on an assumption that more visitors, particularly visitors with children, will be encouraged to come to the site in the quieter periods during the week. The business plan has not been released as it is a working draft subject to changes as the details of the proposals are worked up. It is however based on a presumption that the investment made by the County Council will be paid back with interest within the business plan period and subsequent income will offset the revenue cost of maintaining visitor facilities at the site.

Newlands Corner is part of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the greenbelt and a well-loved beauty spot, and the new infrastructure has been sensitively designed to reflect this. The parking meters will be operated by solar power, so we no longer need permission for a temporary trench and the wooden shelters will not be installed. The meters will be located on the northern edge of the car park, backing onto woodland, one close to the Visitor room and Café and two further down the car park as shown on the application plan. They will not include lighting other than any light provided as part of the machine. CCTV cameras are already operating on the site and are as discrete as they can be. One camera is used to watch the wildlife in the garden adjacent to the café. Signage has been designed to provide the necessary information and will be sited as sensitively as possible, avoiding obstructing the view.

No work is planned in the view or on the open downland, however with the income from the car parking charges there will be funding to ensure that the view is kept clear of encroaching vegetation, old photographs show that the whole top of the slope was much more open in the 1960s and 70s.

SCC is very aware that car parking charges are not popular and there has been a campaign to encourage the public to object to the current application on the basis that they are part of wider plans for the site. SCC has taken this decision to bring in charges following an assessment of the whole Countryside Estate, 10,000 acres across the County, and looked at the best way of conserving and enhancing that Estate for the future. As the current financial situation gets worse for the public sector it is important to agree what the priorities should be. Countryside management is a largely discretionary service and as such is currently receiving less and less public funding. The public have made it clear that they value and love the countryside and want to see access maintained; this can only happen if there is sufficient funding to pay for its management. A number of other ways of generating income are also being considered, but car parking charges provide a reliable and fair way of generating an income that reflects the costs car users impose on the site but do not deny people access on foot. Charges for parking are also frequently made at other countryside sites in and around Surrey. We are also aware that charges could have an adverse impact on access to the site for some people and will monitor the impact once they are in place. Blue Badge holders will not be charged and neither will motorcyclists and there will be a 20 minute free period to allow passers-by to stop and use the facilities. We are also not going to charge volunteers who work on the site and others who are delivering public services, such as health walks or are involved in surveys on the site.

Work has been done to plot out where displacement parking may occur and this will be monitored once the charges are in place. There are 4 other car parks serving the Albury Estate and at present there are no plans to introduce parking charges at the smaller car parks around the site.

The income from the charges will be collected by Surrey Wildlife Trust, a percentage will go to the Albury Estate as the landowner to enable it to enhance its management of the downland habitat and the rest will go into the Business Plan for the whole Countryside Estate. However the first call for any income will be the management of Newlands Corner. The figures being quoted are full cost recovery figures as part of the overall business plan for the Countryside Estate and therefore include an element of overheads.

Several representations have criticised SCC for not considering the suggestion of setting up a Friends of Newlands Corner Group. It was considered and more information was needed to understand the exact role the Friends Group would take and where they would generate their revenue from. The offer to discuss the Friends Group is still open. In the interim SWT would welcome volunteers to get involved in managing the countryside estate.

The existing café operator is a tenant of the Albury Estate and there is no proposal to remove him. The impact of parking charges on the café has been taken into account and led to the decision to have a 20 minute free period for visitors who are just stopping for refreshment. Future impact will be monitored and adjustments made if the charges have a negative impact on the café.

Concern has been expressed in several representations about the safety of the access off the A25 to Newlands Corner. A separate road improvement scheme is being undertaken by SCC Highways and this will see the speed limit lowered on the stretch from the Clandon crossroads to the turning into Albury, along with clearer signs warning of the accesses off of the A25 including Newlands Corner.

SCC have made information available on our website and will continue to keep it updated.

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