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**Norbury Park Our Vision: A better place for nature and enjoyment**

**October 2021**

**The Vision for Norbury Park**

**A better place for nature and enjoyment**

**The vision for Norbury Park is that it provides for both nature and enjoyment through a balance of rich natural habitats and facilities to enable community use. The estate will be actively managed and maintained to provide a haven for nature, a place for the production of food, the storage and sequestration of carbon, the natural regulation of water flows, and a space for the people of Surrey to enjoy and engage with their countryside.**

**Our aim is to optimise the contribution that Norbury Park makes to the health and social well-being of the people of Surrey, reversing nature loss, enabling natural flood management, mitigating and managing climate change, conserving and interpreting heritage, supporting farming, woodland and rural crafts whilst providing access and community engagement opportunities.**

**The land, buildings and activities that take place on the estate will be managed and sensitively developed to offer enhanced opportunities for the local community as well as maximising the provision of habitats for nature and managing the effects of climate change.**

**To achieve this, appropriately scaled and designed infrastructure will provide new facilities for increased community engagement and public recreational access in a manner which works alongside nature recovery.**

**Provision will be made for training, education, enterprise, and employment connected to the heritage and natural environment of the park, with an emphasis on woodland management and associated crafts and products.**

**New approaches to land management will be introduced that combine more regenerative approaches to agriculture and woodland with the**

**creation of new and enhanced ‘low or no intervention’ habitats and maximising the potential of the land to store and sequester carbon and naturally regulate water flows.**

**The aim is to establish an appropriate balance between nature recovery, recreation and engagement - finding synergies between the land and the people who care for and enjoy it, maximising the contribution Norbury Park makes to reversing nature loss, managing climate change and providing access and engagement opportunities for the local community.**

**FIGURE 1: THE VISION FOR NORBURY PARK AND INTENDED OUTCOMES**

**From: Conventional agriculture. To: Regenerative agriculture**

**Outcomes: Increased habitat value, carbon sequestration and flood alleviation**

**From: Limited visitor facilities. To: New, low impact visitor and activities facilities and activities**

**Outcomes: Increased use of park for recreation by underrepresented groups, improved health and wellbeing outcomes for all visitors**

**From: Active habitat and landscape management. To: Nature recovery measures integrated into landscape management**

**Outcomes: Increased habitat value, carbon sequestration and flood alleviation**

**From: Significant flooding events. To: Proactive landscape system led flood management**

**Outcomes: Flood events reduced in frequency and severity**

**From: Operational sawmill and wood products business products. To: Woodland Hub providing facilities for woodland management and associated products, crafts and training**

**Outcomes: Increase social value through appropriate reuse of former industrial site**

**In delivering this vision, we envisage that:**

**Very little will change. We, like most of the community and stakeholders we have spoken to, are very content with much about Norbury Park.**

**We do however want to ensure the estates’ natural capital and landscape assets are in the best possible condition and performing as well as they can in terms of carbon storage and sequestration, water flow regulation (natural flood management), water and air quality regulation.**

**We want to make Norbury Park a better place for nature as well as for people.**

**We want to make Norbury Park easier to access, explore and enjoy, in particular by groups currently underrepresented in the use of the countryside and its associated benefits for health and wellbeing.**

**This will require the creation of new, low impact facilities to support users of the park to access recreational, educational and employment opportunities**

**Working with partners and the community, Surrey County Council (SCC) hope to improve the natural environment across Norbury Park and enhance the role it plays in providing access to nature and outdoor recreational activities for the community.**

**The intention is that Norbury Park will become a pilot project for how SCC can use its wider rural and countryside estate to further its environmental contribution and importantly create opportunities for people to engage with the natural environment and role of green space in improving health and wellbeing and tackling climate change and nature loss.**

**This document sets out the component parts of this vision to inform stakeholder, partner and community engagement with the proposals.**

**INTRODUCTION**

**Land is an asset that can create a range of benefits – economic, environmental and social - and SCC**

**is in a position of owning land at a scale where these opportunities can be optimised for the benefit**

**of those living and working on and with the land, local communities, the people of Surrey, visitors**

**and the wider economy and environment.**

**Ownership of land and natural capital is a privilege. Access to land, the natural capital assets it supports, and the ecosystem services that the combination of environmental process and human**

**intervention create are some of the richest opportunities available to society. Land ownership**

**carries responsibility and an opportunity which SCC is committed to ensuring these assets are managed in a way which delivers optimum returns balanced across a series of objectives.**

**This challenge used to be relatively simple. The primary function of land since the Second World War has generally been accepted as production (food and timber) with secondary functions emerging associated with public access, recreation, and public enjoyment.**

**The picture is now far more complex. There is a recognition that the way in which we value and**

**manage our land needs to change. There is a greater and more widely shared understanding of its natural capital value, the importance of ancient woodland and veteran trees, of clean and naturally regulated water flows, of the health and well-being benefits land and access to it can deliver, and the often negative impacts that traditional approaches to land management can create.**

**As a major landowner holding assets for the wider public good, SCC can work to optimise the benefits delivered by the land it owns. This process is underway with the creation of the Countryside**

**Enhancement Transformation programme which has been designed to identify opportunities to enhance access to and enjoyment of the countryside estate.**

**The transformation programme has initially focussed on enhancing public access and optimising the benefits of the countryside estate for the community in terms of recreational opportunity.**

**SCC have been considering opportunities to enhance recreational opportunity in Norbury Park,**

**and now wish to determine how the estate can be managed to trial new ways of ‘nature led’ land**

**management alongside the delivery of visitor and community facilities aimed at maximising the**

**contribution it makes to nature recovery, climate change and community health and wellbeing.**

**NORBURY PARK**

**Mentioned in the Doomsday Survey of 1086, Norbury Park has been in the ownership of SCC since the early 1930s. Purchased by the Council to protect the land from being broken up for housing development, Norbury Park is a much-valued resource for recreation, farming, woodland and nature.**

**Sitting within the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) the 1,340 acres park Norbury Park comprises mixed woodland and farmland. Natural capital assets include Ancient Woodland, parcels of Chalk Downland and water meadow. A significant proportion of the estate lies within the Grade 2 Registered Park and Garden.**

**Parts of the estate are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), and the estate is within the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).**

**There are three tenanted farms within the estate as well as a range of residential properties and buildings owned by SCC. There are also a number of privately owned properties, most of which were historically part of the larger estate.**

**The topography of the estate, associated landscapes, vegetation and wildlife create an attractive and appealing setting and provides a range of ecosystem services including carbon sequestration and storage, regulation of water flows, clean air, biodiversity and opportunities for recreation.**

**Paths, trails and tracks crisscross the park allowing for walking and to lesser extent cycling and horse riding opportunities. Currently, there are no facilities for visitors beyond car parking and a ‘pop up’ coffee outlet, however the estate is well used by the local community for informal recreation and visitor numbers have increased significantly during the Covid pandemic.**

**Whilst the landscape supports a range of existing habitats and the inherent benefits of tree and vegetation cover, it has not to date been actively managed to deliver a wider set of ecosystem services.**

**Parts of the estate have the potential to be improved through more regenerative management to optimise their condition and the benefits provided, be that carbon storage, habitat provision, natural flood management or recreational opportunity.**

**Rich in heritage and having undergone a series of changes and evolutions in terms of ownership, land cover, activities and enterprise and activities hosted, the estate holds a high level of significance for residents and is an important part of the Surrey Hills landscape.**

**The Council’s aim is not to radically change Norbury Park, rather to build on its heritage, natural beauty and sense of place to create more opportunities for enjoyment and nature.**

**SCC is now seeking to engage with partners, stakeholders and the local community to define the long term strategy for its management of Norbury Park, and to take forward some projects in the short term which will create the foundations for these wider ambitions.**

**THE CASE FOR CHANGE**

**The Countryside Enhancement Transformation Programme themes are:**

**Make information exciting**

**Something for everyone**

**Creating reasons to visit**

**Celebrate and treasure**

**Accessible: information and transport**

**Enables health and well-being**

**THE CASE FOR CHANGE: PEOPLE**

**The benefits of time spent in nature for physical and mental health and well-being are now widely recognised with public access and recreational opportunity identified as an ecosystem service that delivers significant value to society.**

**Surrey County Council owns more than 2,300 hectares (6,500 acres) of countryside as well as entering into access agreements with private landowners to provide public access to a total of over 3,500 hectares (10,000 acres) of Surrey’s beautiful countryside. This is known as Surrey’s Countryside Estate.**

**The Countryside Estate includes 17 sites for recreation including parks, commons, and woodlands. Norbury park is identified as one of the flagship locations. SCC has recognised the opportunity to deliver greater health and wellbeing benefits from its countryside estate and have initiated a Countryside Enhancement Transformation Programme focussed on enhancing access for local residents through projects aligned to six themes.**

**Findings of research and community engagement carried out by the Council are that the most common motivator across all groups for visiting the countryside is to enhance physical and mental health.**

**Different groups are motivated to spend time in the countryside in different ways. Families and young people are attracted by experience and activities whilst older or disabled residents generally preferred the tranquillity, they associate with spending time in the country.**

**The main barriers to use and access of the council’s Countryside Estate cited by the public are transport, design and maintenance, information and communications, and access to or lack of on-site facilities.**

**Work is underway to assess the options for the Countryside Estate to provide enhanced opportunities for recreation and quiet enjoyment and detailed work focussed on Norbury Park has identified a range of proposals for a programme of improvement and sensitive development to support visitor use.**

**THE CASE FOR CHANGE: NATURE**

**The case for tackling biodiversity loss, climate change and environmental risks to public health is pressing, with widespread recognition of the twin crises of the accelerating impact of climate change and decline of habitats and species loss. The government has published a bold 25 Year Environment Plan and set a target to reach net zero emissions and there are a plethora of policies, strategies and pilot schemes aimed at improving the natural environment, tackling the effects of climate change, reversing nature loss and maximising associated social and economic benefits. The question is no longer if, but when and how action will be taken to address these issues.**

**SCC has responded to this with a range of policy measures which set out the ambitions for the**

**county to address environmental issues. Surrey’s Greener Future Climate Change Delivery Plan identifies four areas of focus to reflect changes that need to happen: in our communities, our public sector, our supporting infrastructure and our land.**

**GREENER FUTURES Climate Change Delivery Plan Themes**

**Greener Futures Communities**

**One Net Zero Public Estate**

**Grow back Greener**

**Build Back Greener**

**The stated aim for the Grow Back Greener theme is:**

**Aim: Managing woodland, green spaces and farmland to maximise our ability to absorb carbon from the atmosphere, grow food sustainably and improve habitats needed for wildlife to thrive.**

**These commitments require sustained and meaningful action if they are to be achieved, and for the people, businesses, and politicians of Surrey to be willing to embrace natural change, work together and prioritise the environment in decision making.**

**Climate change and nature loss are intrinsically linked and the role of our green spaces in tackling both are more important than ever before. Nature based solutions are widely recognised as having an important role to play in tackling climate change by increasing the carbon storage and sequestration capacity of soils, water bodies, hedges and woodlands.**

**By managing land in a way which optimises this capacity – such as through the restoration of forests or wetlands - nature based solutions have the advantage of tackling climate change at the same time as supporting biodiversity and providing a wide range of benefits to people, ranging from natural flood management to health and well-being.**

**Those who own and manage the land consequently have a key role to play in addressing the challenges and opportunities faced and the Agriculture Bill sets a new direction for how land is to be managed with an emphasis on the environment over production. Farming is one of the highest potential environmental management tools we have and the shift to focus on optimising the land for a wider set of natural capital outcomes than just food production will enable farmers to continue to play a key role in land management in the future.**

**There are around 15 farm enterprises operating across the council owned estate. Some of these are already working to enhanced environmental principles guided by landscape designations. There is now an opportunity to facilitate other farm enterprises to operate in a manner which focuses on regenerative land management practices on all or part of their holdings.**

**The focus on access and engagement for recreation delivers an important public benefit from green spaces. SCC would like to explore further how this can work in tandem with optimising the contribution its land makes to nature recovery and managing the impacts of climate change.**

**DELIVERING THE VISION**

**The vision for Norbury Park is for it to provide for both nature and enjoyment through a balance of rich natural habitats and facilities to support community use. The land, buildings and activities that take place within it will offer enhanced opportunities for the enjoyment by the local community as well as maximising the provision of habitats for nature and managing the effects of climate change.**

**The strategy for Norbury Park is nature led - beginning the transition to regenerative land management, focussed initially on areas of greatest opportunity for enhancement, alongside the creation of new infrastructure for visitors and facilities to support community engagement and education.**

**Longer term, the ambition is to move towards a nature led approach to managing the whole of Norbury Park to maximise the contribution the estate makes to climate change, biodiversity and public recreation.**

**The objectives for Norbury Park are that it:**

**Hosts a regenerative approach to land management that balances the production of food and active woodland management with carbon storage and sequestration, nature recovery and natural flood management.**

**Host viable farm enterprises and evolves the role of agriculture in sustainable land use systems.**

**Provide appropriate facilities and infrastructure to support visitors and groups engaged in activities to promote learning, health & wellbeing, rehabilitation, and recreation.**

**Contribute to peoples understanding of the role of land and nature in tackling climate change and the provision of habitats.**

**Create opportunities for education, enterprise, and engagement for the community, with provision for marginalised groups.**

**SCC has looked at the natural and built assets of the estate to determine how these can best be leveraged to meet these objectives. Proposals have emerged to introduce some new visitor facilities and infrastructure and for transitional management arrangements designed to create the foundations for the shift to a regenerative system.**

**The proposals can be summarised as:**

**The introduction of two trails with supporting equipment, one Active and one Sensory, together with improvements to the Young Street Car Park and the introduction of a natural play and picnic area.**

**To create a low impact visitor hub at the old Sawmill site to provide toilet and associated facilities for those utilising the estate for recreation and to accommodate training, community groups and businesses connected to rural crafts and woodland management.**

**To carry out an assessment of the natural capital assets across Norbury Park to identify opportunities for enhancement and inform longer term estate scale or localised future land management strategies to maximise the delivery of ecosystem services.**

**To make an incremental shift to a regenerative land management and farming strategy at Swanworth Farm, working with the tenant to establish a new way of working aimed at nature recovery, maximising carbon storage and sequestration, improved regulation of water flows, improved water quality and the long-term financial viability of the farm enterprise.**

**PLACES AND PROJECTS**

**The wider land area of Norbury Park hosts varied environmental, landscape, topographical features including a river, escarpment, ancient woodland and parkland, meaning it is rich in natural capital and already generating valuable ecosystem services. The value of the site is reflected in its various designations designed to protect this important asset. Norbury Park is within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Green Belt, Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC). A large area is also designated as Ancient Woodland.**

**Norbury Park is served by three car parks and a range of footpaths and trails which enable people to enjoy the estate on foot, by bicycle and on horseback.**

**Some opportunities to make use of and experience the estate have been created for marginalised groups, for example, those involving the Young Offender rehabilitation programmes, but this**

**potential is currently constrained by the lack of facilities.**

**RECREATION, ENTERPRISE, EDUCATION and ENGAGEMENT**

**The Council plans to make use of various sites across the park to support the management of Norbury Park and to provide improved visitor facilities and experience. Various projects are in development:**

**Active Trail - a waymarked 5km circular trail from Fetcham Car Park taking in Bocketts Farm Park, the Sawmill and Viewpoint with four ‘trim trail’ type installations to support health & fitness, balance and dexterity.**

**The Scrubs Sensory Trail - with spaces and information to support people to heighten their senses and get closer to nature and the natural environment.**

**The Bothy – will be used by the SCC Countryside Service, their contractors and support teams as a management depot. It will be used for storage and as a base for management operations.**

**The Sawmill – the Sawmill site will be developed to host new visitor toilets, a serviced pitch for ‘pop up’ food & beverage offer(s), space for education and learning experiences in woodland, rural crafts and nature, seasonal glamping, events and ‘pop up’ opportunities for artisan businesses to engage**

**with visitors.**

**Swanworth Farm – space will continue to be provided at Swanworth Farm for seasonal glamping and camping and for the occasional weekend event during the summer.**

**Car Park improvements and the introduction of natural play and picnic area at Young Street.**

**The continued use of the ‘wedding field’ for celebration events.**

**A WOODLAND HUB**

**The most significant proposal in terms of investment and change of use is that associated with the old sawmill site.**

**The site was, until May 2021, an operational sawmill. The sawmill closed earlier this year as a viable operational future could not be found and the site is consequently available to support the Council’s wider objectives.**

**The site extends to some 1.3 acres, bounded by a perimeter fence with vehicular and pedestrian access from the main trackway that runs from Fetcham towards Mickleham. The site contains**

**a number of buildings including a large steel framed workshop, smaller original brick and slate buildings, an open sided sawmill and drying sheds.**

**It is proposed to re-purpose the site to create a woodland hub – utilising existing buildings and some light touch additional infrastructure to host toilet facilities, picnic areas, standings for the pop up ‘Wild About Coffee’ food outlet, units and workshops for small businesses and training/community use.**

**There is to be a focus on ‘woodland enterprise’ and traditional rural crafts – creating opportunities for local businesses who will in turn provide employment, apprenticeships, and training and to generate income to contribute to the development costs of repurposing and the ongoing running of the**

**site.**

**Information about the history and natural environment of Norbury Park will be included using interpretation boards and space will be made available for informal learning alongside provision for more structured training activities in the existing workshops.**

**There is a great deal of interest in the history and heritage of Norbury Park and about nature based solutions to climate change and approaches such as ‘rewilding’ are increasingly popular so the visitor hub provides an opportunity to share information about the history and land management of the wider park and the benefits it is hoped this will deliver.**

**The site will be required to generate income to pay for a proportion of its running costs, and to cover the development costs of the site so consideration is being given to further development in the future including a small number of canvas bell tents to provide a simple overnight accommodation offer and additional income stream. These could be utilised by groups such as Guides or Scouts outside of the tourist season furthering the benefits to the local community.**

**Sensitively redeveloped, the new enterprise would result in a less intensive use of the site (no ongoing heavy vehicle access or heavy industrial processes). The aim would be to create a scheme that uses the existing footprint with limited new structures added, retaining the sawmill and woodland products association through design.**

**Provision would be made for those with additional access needs including toilet facilities and a small number of disabled parking spaces. The design and development would be undertaken in a manner which minimises environmental impact with sustainable energy and waste solutions in place and an intention to increase the biodiversity on the site from current levels through the inclusion of planting and wildlife friendly measures.**

**By creating a low-key visitor element, the woodland hub will enable wider access to its services and enable a longer ‘dwell time’ for visitors to the wider estate, encouraging outdoor recreation and enhancing the contribution of the estate to the physical and mental wellbeing benefits of the local**

**community.**

**Visitor access to the site will be on foot or by bike, and the site will be retained by the existing perimeter, ensuring that the impact on the natural environment is minimised. The site will become a natural stopping off point and destination for people enjoying the estate for walking or cycling but will not be intended as an ‘attraction’ in its own right – those using it will be those who come to enjoy the natural environment that Norbury Park offers.**

**LANDSCAPE**

**Woods, grassland, heath, farmland and the River Mole**

**Norbury Park is a green space currently hosting wildlife, a range of vegetation types, waterways, three farm enterprises and parkland. Despite the apparent abundance of the natural asset base, Norbury Park is not currently managed to optimise nature or mitigate climate change.**

**Parts of the land are ecologically depleted, there is widespread ash dieback, evidence of significant veteran tree loss and there have been material flooding events affecting farmland and the A24.**

**SCC intends to address these issues by producing a detailed 10-year management plan to deliver the balance between nature, carbon, access, natural flood risk management and other ecosystem services to reflect the new pressures on land management.**

**This will be based upon a long-term process led land management strategy that optimises the environmental contribution that Norbury Park makes, however with various farm tenancies, ancient woodland and open access across the site there are a unique set of challenges to achieve a process led system. In order to help to imagine the most creative and exciting opportunities for biodiversity conservation, it will be necessary in time to work at an estate wide scale.**

**An initial review has indicated that there is potential for a wood pasture, wetland and floodplain meadow system integrated with well managed woodland. Such an approach represents an exciting long-term opportunity to regenerate Norbury Park and repair ecological depletion.**

**This long-term vision will need to be underpinned by detailed investigations and plans as to how this would be achieved. SCC is proposing to take a staged approach to ensure balance with the access and recreational objectives of the council and the implications in terms of farm business and land management.**

**Farming has been an important part of Norbury Park for centuries. There are three farms in Norbury Park which play an important role in managing the landscape and the habitats it supports. Any proposals for the future management of the estate will consider the role of productive farming as part of a sustainable land use strategy.**

**Given the climate and nature loss drivers influencing UK policy makers and public opinion, agriculture in the United Kingdom faces the biggest changes in a generation as the Common Agricultural Policy payments are phased out and a new funding regime is introduced. Based on the principles of ‘public money for public good’ with the new Environmental Land Management Schemes set to reward farmers for producing public goods on their land.**

**Farming practices in the estate are conventional and have responded to the previous payment regime, with a primary focus on food production. Parts of the estate present challenges to the farmers – with flooding, soil quality and infrastructure limitations impacting farm performance.**

**The farms have not, like almost all farms in the UK, been managed in line with the principles of regenerative land management.**

**The Council plans to work with its farm tenants and contractors to achieve an incremental shift towards an approach that will actively manage the natural capital of Norbury Park for the benefit**

**of nature alongside food production and to deliver the best public value from the ecosystem services it can provide. These include:**

**The production of food, timber and fibre.**

**The creation and maintenance of habitat to support and enhance biodiversity.**

**The storage and sequestration of carbon.**

**The ongoing improvement of soil health.**

**The regulation of water flows delivering natural flood management.**

**The regulation of water quality via reduced nutrient leaching and soil erosion.**

**The regulation of air quality.**

**Work is underway to determine the optimum land management strategy. It is likely this will include:**

**Active management of the woodlands including coppicing, the removal of trees that pose a threat to safe public access, those suffering from a substantive disease (such as ash dieback) and areas of natural regeneration where this prejudices the natural chalk downland alongside Areas of re-planting.**

**Managed access in some areas of the park for the benefit of nature and to ensure public safety.**

**Interventions to increase natural solutions for flood prevention and mitigation.**

**Interventions in partnership with the Council’s farm tenants to enable a shift to more regenerative practices focussed on nature recovery, flood management and lower input farming techniques.**

**SWANWORTH FARM**

**Swanworth Farm covers in the region of 153 acres and is comprised of eleven fields. Nine of these fields are pasture, with the remainder arable. In the northeast region of the site sits Swanworth Farmstead, comprising of a farmhouse with six outbuildings, including a large barn.**

**The farm has been managed according to conventional agricultural practice with a focus on production and maximising stocking levels. However, a large proportion of the farm is designated as Flood Zone 3 and due to flooding, soil type and ground conditions, the arable land is not currently in productive use, the farmstead is in poor structural condition and the farm is not financially viable long term in its current form.**

**The farm tenant is committed to the land and the local area having lived and farmed here all his life. Working with SCC and its advisors, a strategy for a transition to a more regenerative and sustainable way of farming at Swanworth Farm is emerging.**

**The initial proposals under consideration for Swanworth Farm are:**

**The creation of new wood pasture.**

**The re-wetting of some areas.**

**A reduction in livestock numbers whilst extending managed grazing to uphill areas to help maintain chalk grassland and heath.**

**A reduction in the use of artificial fertilisers and chemicals.**

**Regeneration and improvement of hay meadows.**

**A gradual naturalisation of grazing land on the flood plain of the River Mole.**

**CONCLUSION and NEXT STEPS**

**Norbury Park presents an exciting opportunity to combine regenerative land and woodland management with engagement and recreational opportunities for the people of Surrey.**

**SCC is committed to undertaking any change in a way which brings those who manage and enjoy the land on the journey, working together to develop a long term strategy for the estate that sees it become a major contributor to Surrey’s environment, helps to deliver material social gains whilst enabling the community to continue to enjoy informal access and quiet recreation.**

**SCC is engaging with a range of stakeholders, community representatives and the public about its vision for Norbury Park. Whilst feedback will be taken into consideration and a final vision document published in 2022. Some low impact works will begin to take place in the winter of 2021.**

**To share your views on the Surrey County Council’s emerging vision for Norbury Park go to:**

**https://www.surreysays.co.uk/environment-and-infrastructure/norbury-park-vision-consultation**

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