**Friends of Newlands Corner**

**Introduction**

At a meeting with Surrey County Council (SCC) on 19 April 2016, the Save Newlands Corner Campaign Group (SaveNC) agreed to put forward alternative arrangements for the management of Newlands Corner. SaveNC believes that the site could be managed on the basis of a ‘Friends of Newlands Corner’ model in a much more cost-effective way than is currently the case. The ‘Friends’ concept would also retain the wild and open nature of the site and avoid the commercial proposals put forward by SCC.

SCC said ‘we remain open to discuss any thoughts or proposals you may have’. SaveNC welcome this opportunity to submit our outline ideas for an alternative way forward and the reasoning behind them.

At the time of the meeting, critical information about vehicle figures and maintenance costs was still awaited. Much of that has information has recently been provided, but further clarification is being sought.

This report is, therefore, correct to the best of our knowledge. It was completed in a short time frame and we acknowledge that much more work needs to be done to firm up on the proposals.

**The Site**

Newlands Corner consists of 255 acres of registered common land which is owned by the Albury Estate. It is also part of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and has the North Downs Way running through it.

The public currently has a legal right to access the site including rights of way.

The Albury Estate manages the woodland and grassland areas. The car park, toilets and visitors centre are leased for a fee to SCC which employs Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) to maintain them.

The outdoor café is leased by the Albury Estate to an independent provider who is responsible for cleaning the toilet block, cleaning litter from the eastern half of the car park and 20 metres around it, arranging sale and distribution of countryside information leaflets, and observing public access to (and cleaning the floor of) the visitors centre.

**Current Proposals**

SCC has a Countryside Estate of more than 10,000 acres in Surrey, of which 6,500 acres are owned and the rest leased by SCC. It has an agreement with SWT to manage this estate. Due to financial constraints, SCC decided not only to reduce the amount it pays to SWT from about £1 million a year but to make it cost neutral over the 5 years ending in 2020/21 and to achieve this by making the Countryside Estate self-financing. A new agreement with SWT was approved in SCC’s Cabinet meetings on 16 December 2014 and 22 March 2016. The Business Plan supporting the agreement has yet to be finalised.

SCC’s stated intention is that income from Newlands Corner will not only finance the site, but also produce the majority of the money required to pay for the whole of the Countryside Estate. It is intended to achieve this through the following changes agreed by SCC at their Cabinet meeting on 27 October 2015

**Phase 1**

* Placing artificial play structures in cleared sites throughout the woodland. Originally 10 such sites were proposed. It appears these may now be reduced.
* Refurbishment of toilets, resurfacing hard trail, putting in the structure for car park charging, and some minor changes to existing café and visitors centre.
* Introduction of car park charges of £1 an hour: maximum £4, up to 20 minutes free.

**Phase 2**

* Putting in a very large commercial development including a visitor centre, café, shop and coach park. The original plan, ecology report and archaeological report showed this to be across the front of the view. Following public outcry, SCC has confirmed that this location will not be used, Apparently architects have been instructed to look at three options: one will be on the site of the present café and two in ‘forward positions’. It appears this part of the proposals (phase 2) might now be delayed. No business case has been compiled yet.

SCC has said the reasoning for the play trail is to encourage more children into the countryside.

SCC also wants to substantially increase the number of visits to the site – to widen the number of visitors. Our understanding is that it was trying to increase the vehicle numbers from its original estimate of 122,000 a year at present to about 180,000 over 3 years. However, its estimate of 122,000 has now been shown to be incorrect as 255,000 vehicles visit each year. Adding another 60,000 vehicles onto this figure will have serious consequences for the site – not least its ability to cope with the sheer volume of traffic.

**Costs**

The cost of the phase 1 changes (i.e. excluding the commercial development) is put at £400,000 (including £210,000 for the play trail) which would be borrowed and paid back out of the parking charges over 8 years.

SCC has recently substantially changed the maintenance costs it had originally quoted. It has estimated the current annual cost to maintain the site to be £157,000, and it has estimated the future annual cost (after the phase 1 changes) to be £310,000 plus additional management costs and overheads.

The costs quoted are set out in Appendix A. SaveNC is seeking clarification on these figures.

**Problems with Current Proposals**

1. **Business Case**

SCC has refused to date to provide campaigners with a copy of its business plan. For months, campaigners have been disputing SCC’s quoted estimate of 122,000 vehicles a year using the car park, as being based on out of date and statistically invalid data. Following a Public Question to Cabinet on 26 April 2016, SCC has now said that a recent count confirms that 255,000 vehicles used the car park between February 2015 and January 2016.

If we assume, for example, that 255,000 vehicles continue to use the site, and 30% of these do not pay (because they are there under 20 minutes, choose not to pay, or have disabled badges) and that 70% pay on average £2, the gross income would be £357,000. Since we understand that local authorities and charities pay VAT on car park charges, this would be reduced by £59,500 (VAT at the current rate) to £297,500. Furthermore, it is likely that, due to the charges, many people will be put off from using the car park or will reduce the amount of time they spend on the site. So, we estimate the actual net income is more likely to be between £200,000 and £250,000.

SCC has quoted ongoing costs for Newlands Corner after the phase 1 proposals are implemented of £310,000 plus an unspecified amount of extra management costs and overheads. So, under the current proposals, Newlands Corner is likely to produce a deficit, and it is unlikely there will be any surplus to pay for the rest of the Countryside Estate.

Furthermore, there is no capacity for the increase in vehicle numbers, and therefore the parking charge income, that we assume the SCC business plan anticipates. We believe that SCC was anticipating a gradual increase from 122,000 to about 180,000 vehicles over 3 years. However, it has now been established that there are already 255,000 vehicles a year using the car park. The size and nature of Newlands Corner are insufficient to increase vehicle numbers further, without further encroachment into the countryside.

SCC has made much of the fact that it hopes to see vehicle numbers increase over a spread of times during the day and week. However, it cannot avoid the fact that the site is always most popular, and very often full, when there is pleasant weather, at weekends and during holidays. Therefore, by far the greatest increase in numbers will be during the current peak periods.

Furthermore, the road capacity and safety leading to the site (a single main road to access the site with the entrance on the brow of the hill with very limited visibility) is insufficient to increase vehicle numbers.

SCC has not yet put together a business plan for phase 2 of the proposals.

1. **Public opposition and challenge**

Massive public opposition to the proposals for Newlands Corner is demonstrated by:

* A petition signed by nearly 11,000 people, so far, against the proposals
* 80-85% of people commenting on the play structures do not want them at all
* A packed public meeting on 9 March, with about 250 present, where, by a show of hands, over 99% were against the proposals
* Many protest letters sent to the Newlands Corner Project at SCC and to councillors
* Negative coverage, week after week, in local media

Protest has already delayed the project months beyond the Project Milestones in the SCC Report to Cabinet of 27 October 2015, with an associated increase in costs. Campaigners will not reduce their efforts. Opposition is likely to extend to other areas of the Countryside Estate once the threat is fully realised.

Dependence on the income from Newlands Corner entails considerable risk to the business plan, if approvals are not obtained. There will be challenges against any

* Application to the Planning Inspectorate to build play structures on the common land that is Newlands Corner
* Planning application to the local authority for the play structures
* Charging for, or extension of, parking which may need consents, particularly given the fact that Newlands Corner is in the Green Belt.
* Threat to the protected species on the site. In addition, any ecology reports produced by SWT could be challenged on the grounds of conflict of interest.
* Planning application for a large café, visitor centre, shop, other commercial building or coach and additional parking.

The lack of consultation and inadequate communication also risk challenge, particularly to any application to the Planning Inspectorate.

SWT's participation in the commercialisation of the Countryside Estate could be challenged as being in conflict with their principles of operation.

1. **Increased costs and reduction of income**

The financial projections in the business case are being, and will be, affected by

* **Delay**. The start date for parking charges has already been delayed by months
* **A reduction in visitors**. Many people have said they will stop visiting, if parking charges are imposed. Behavioural change may bring about a significant reduction in vehicle numbers and, thereby, income from parking
* A **SCC survey of 220 visitors** asked their opinions about Newlands Corner. It did not ask about a play trail and no one asked for a play trail. No evidence exists that a play trail would attract enough people to counterbalance, and increase beyond, the loss outlined above to produce the required income stream
* **The road access to Newlands Corner** is a dangerous junction on the busy A25, on the brow of a hill. SCC’s aim to increase vehicle numbers would exacerbate the problem. The Highways Authority is considering improvements to the A25, but it appears these costs have not been factored into the business plan. It is also not clear if these take into account the proposals under Phase 2, particularly coaches
* **Social care costs**. There is no scheduled public transport to the site. Imposing parking charges is likely to significantly reduce the numbers of low-income families and the elderly coming to the site. In these particular groups, a reduction in healthy exercise and wellbeing will increase social care costs and NHS costs.
1. **Other financial considerations**

**Efficiency**

SCC has quoted a current annual maintenance cost of £157,000 for Newlands Corner – which comprises one car park, toilet maintenance and path clearance. The Friends of the Hurtwood maintain 3,500 acres and 15 car parks for £70,000 a year. The SCC figure indicates probable inefficiency and lack of financial control.

**Initial and ongoing costs**

In Phase 1, the proposals for Newlands Corner involve spending £400,000 of public money on so-called 'improvements' that, in the main, the public do not want. This is no model for a business plan. The proposals involve much greater ongoing maintenance and management costs for: depreciation, maintenance, risk of liability, parking charging and enforcement and wardens. This will increase the estimated ongoing costs from £157,000, to £310,000 a year plus extra management costs and overheads.

**Failure**

There will be consequences if the SCC scheme fails. For Newlands Corner this might involve additional cost in removing the parking charge structure and play trail, redundancy of staff, ongoing payment of annual lease payment to the Albury Estate. Any buildings erected and closed will revert to the Albury Estate. This would waste public money and is not acceptable in a business plan. If SWT itself fails, there have been no defined contingency plans.

**Albury Estate**

SCC pays the Albury Estate an annual amount of £800 plus increases since 1991 (current amount not revealed) plus 25% of any net profit (i.e. from parking charges etc). We have been told the 25% is under discussion, however a percentage of any net profit will be paid to the Albury Estate.

**Surrey Wildlife Trust**

SWT may suffer damage to their reputation and reduced subscriptions as a result of their involvement with these proposals.

1. **Changes to the environment and nature of the site**

**Spoiling the natural environment**

The main attractions of Newlands Corner are its natural environment and wonderful view. That is why people go there. By clearing areas in the woodland and putting in artificial play structures, the ‘natural’ is gone. Newlands Corner is classified as an Accessible Natural and Semi Natural Greenspace, and it topped Guildford Borough Council’s assessment of such spaces with a score of 70% for quality and facilities. It would be changed into a type of theme park. There are already theme parks of this type that people can go to nearby (Wild Wood at Stoke Park in Guildford, and play trails, cycle tracks and Go Ape at Alice Holt near Farnham). This is not an appropriate place to put this type of theme park .

**Changing the character**

The car park is very popular and packed most weekends with people of all social backgrounds. These include families with children, pensioners, groups of friends, people with disabilities, dog walkers, classic car enthusiasts, motor cyclists, cyclists, ramblers, photographers, horse riders and wildlife enthusiasts. It is a meeting place. People socialise together. They don’t need money to do so. Parking charges would cause particular groups of the above people to stay away.

Play trails, ‘shopping opportunities’ and coach parties are intended to encourage more people who are willing to spend money. The focus will be on attracting people who want to be entertained rather than those who want to enjoy Newlands Corner’s simple pleasures.

The present Newlands Corner ‘community’ is an eclectic mix which breaks down barriers, cements relationships and, through this social interaction, promotes physical and mental wellbeing. It is a unique place, with a unique community spirit. SCC wish to introduce their proposals against the will of a large segment of the public. What the public love about Newlands Corner is its lack of artificial play structures, its lack of shopping opportunities, and its free-to-access availability.

**Flora and fauna**

There are species of plants specific to this particular environment. A recent survey mapped 129 ancient yews, and some of these could be over 1,000 years old. There is also wildlife specific to this environment, including protected species such as bats and dormice. Putting artificial play structures in the woods, with intensive ongoing use, will harm this habitat and the animals and plants that live in it. Encouraging much greater numbers of people onto the site will add significantly to disturbance, damage and threat.

1. **Changes to the people that come to the site**

**Use by schools and young people**

Many schools and organisations currently use Newlands Corner because it is a natural site. Schools from London bring their pupils to experience natural beautiful countryside. It is used for the Duke of Edinburgh award schemes. It is used by the Forest Schools and for Wild Play. They will be less likely to use the site if it is commercialised and turned into a tourist attraction.

**Use by families with children**

The very group of people SCC says it wants to attract into the countryside at Newlands Corner - families with children - go there at the moment. We believe they will be less likely to go there as often, or to stay for as long, if parking charges are introduced.

SCC has said many times that the play structures are designed to attract more children into the countryside. It has produced no evidence that they achieve this. There is a counter argument that such structures will do nothing to increase children’s awareness, or appreciation, of the countryside. They will simply enjoy playing on the play structures. That can be done anywhere. It does not have to be at Newlands Corner. Newlands Corner does not have to be like everywhere else.

**Use by those on limited incomes, the elderly and dog walkers**

People and families on limited incomes that cannot afford the parking charges, the elderly, and dog walkers that come every day, will be less likely to use the site. The first two of these groups are the groups most susceptible to health problems. Lack of fresh air and exercise may well have social and medical consequences.

1. **Road Safety**

**Increase in vehicles**

The entrance to Newlands Corner is on the busy A25 on the brow of a hill with very limited visibility. There have been many road accidents on the roads which provide access to Newlands Corner (Shere Road between the A246 Epsom Road and the A248 Sherbourne). The reported accident figures from 2006 to 2014 are 3 fatal, 13 serious and 40 slight. We are awaiting accident figures from 2015 to date, but are aware of at least 1 fatal and 3 serious ones from the media. Adding in Trodds Lane, another access to the site, would further increase these figures. Several of the serious accidents involved cars with motorcyclists or cyclists.

**Coaches**

The plans for phase 2 show a coach park. Coaches turning in and out on the brow of the hill would be extremely dangerous.

**Displacement Parking**

The other car parks and verges around Newlands Corner would be adversely affected by parking charges imposed at Newlands.

**Friends of Newlands Corner Concept**

At the public meeting on 9 March 2016, SCC agreed to consider the option of a ‘Friends of Newlands Corner’. It has not taken any action on this. However, in a meeting on 19 April 2016, it asked campaigners to put forward their proposals. Campaigners were unable to do so until they received information that they had been requesting and questioning for several months. Much of this information (except for the business plan) has recently been provided, but is still subject to further clarification.

We are aware that SCC and SWT have been planning the current proposals for at least 2 years. It will, therefore, take some time to put together detailed arrangements to replace them. We would start on this and provide a project plan, if SCC confirms that the option is acceptable to them and to the Albury Estate. Our more detailed plans would, of course, have to give SCC and the Albury Estate the necessary assurances to persuade them to ultimately transfer the management of the site to the Friends.

The acceptability to SCC, so far, of a Friends of Newlands Corner option has been constrained by the the consideration that SCC has been relying upon Newlands Corner to pay for much of the cost of its whole Countryside Estate. However, the latest figures indicate that under the current proposals there is unlikely to be any surplus income from Newlands Corner. In fact there could well be a deficit. So, either way, SCC will still have to find a way of funding the rest of its Countryside Estate.

We propose that a Friends of Newlands Corner is set up as a registered charity, drawing upon the experience and constitution of the Friends of the Hurtwood.

The Friends of the Hurtwood is a local charity which manages 3,500 acres and 15 car parks without facilities for £70,000 a year, in the same part of the Surrey Hills as Newlands Corner. Part of the land they manage is owned by Albury Estate, and their Estate Manager is one of the Trustees.

If a new Friends of Newlands Corner charity was to be put in place, several members of the Save Newlands Corner campaign group have already volunteered to help set it up a and to be Trustees. One of these used to give professional advice to trustee boards. Others run their own successful businesses.

Apart from setting up a Friends of Newlands Corner charity, the main aspects to consider are (a) raising funds (b) managing the costs of running the site and (c) preserving and maintaining the site for access, conservation, leisure, enjoyment and education.

Fundamentally, we propose that Newlands Corner has a fresh start and is managed separately from the rest of the SCC Countryside Estate. Both the funding and the maintenance would be taken on by the charity to increase efficiency and avoid overheads.

**Funding**

There are many people interested in keeping Newlands Corner free, unspoilt and natural. This can be seen by the massive public opposition to the current proposals.

We would anticipate a Friends of Newlands Corner being able to raise enough money to maintain the site in a new way by means of

* Member subscriptions
* Donations
* Legacies
* Grants from councils
* Grants from other organisations
* Events

The iconic nature, popularity and significant desire to retain the current status of Newlands Corner should help with this.

There would be a lead-in period while funds were being built up, but those improvements that are to be made could be introduced gradually.

With regards to ongoing maintenance, we suggest that SCC provides sufficient funding over at least the first 2 years while the charity is being established and funds built up. SCC is still providing funding to SWT over the next 5 years and a portion of this could be paid to the new charity instead when Newlands Corner ceases to be SWT’s responsibility to maintain.

The Friends of the Hurtwood raised £78,000 in funds in the year to 31 October 2015.

**Costs**

**Investment Costs**

SCC has quoted a figure of £400,000 for phase 1 investment costs as set out in Appendix A. Most of this cost could be saved by

* No artificial play structures, saving £210,000 alone
* No parking charge equipment – payment machines, signs, CCTV etc
* Improved maintenance of the all ability trail rather than immediate resurfacing
* Improved cleaning of the toilets with some refurbishment when funds are available

The cost of £400,000 was to be borrowed and paid back over 8 years with interest, so this would be a substantial saving.

**Current Ongoing Costs**

The current cost of managing the site is quoted by SCC as £157,000 as set out in Appendix A. This is for maintaining the car park, visitors centre, toilet block (not cleaning), clearing litter in part of the car park, clearing dog poo, and keeping the paths clear to access. There is a small element of amortisation included for visitor centre refurbishment of £8,436.

We believe this could be vastly reduced by means of

* Using volunteer Trustees to replace SCC and SWT management
* Using independent contractors to carry out work
* Using volunteers to carry out work
* Much tighter monitoring and control by virtue of a clean sheet and smaller operation

The largest expense would probably be ranger services.

The Friends of the Hurtwood spent £70,000, including £41,000 for ranger services, in the year to 31 October 2015, for maintaining 3,500 acres and 15 car parks without facilities.

**Future Ongoing Costs**

SCC has estimated £310,000 plus an unspecified amount of extra management costs and overheads for the future running of the site after its phase 1 proposals are implemented, as set out in Appendix A.

The increase in costs brought about by the changes proposed by SCC would be avoided by

* No repayment of the £400,000 investment costs
* No play trail depreciation
* No parking or play trail wardens
* No parking charge enforcement
* No play trail maintenance

The future ongoing costs proposed by SCC are excessive and could be vastly reduced. As set out above, the Friends of the Hurtwood spent £70,000 in the year to 31 October 2015.

**Play Sites**

**No Evidence of Need**

There has been no evidence put forward by SCC that artificial play structures will encourage more people and children into the countryside. Instead, surveys and studies come out in favour of children experiencing the natural environment as it is, and using their imaginations to play in it, for example

* A survey carried out in 2015 by Camping in the Forest (a joint venture between the Forestry Commission and the Camping and Caravanning Club) found that *“The top favourite childhood pastimes in the UK are 1 Riding a bike, 2 Exploring the woods, 3 Making a den, 4 Playing hide or seek, 5 Playing catch, 6 Climbing trees, 7 Having a water pistol fight, 8 Making daisy chains, 9 Wildlife Spotting, 10 Digging”*
* A National Trust paper - Natural Childhood by Stephen Moss - says *“But if outdoor play itself is so good for children, why do they need to leave the playground and explore beyond its boundaries? Because unlike playgrounds created by a human designer, natural environments allow children to play in far more varied and imaginative ways. Compared with man-made playgrounds, the natural world is highly complex, with lots of places to hide and explore; it is untidy, which may be off-putting for adults, but adds to its attraction for children; and above all it is dynamic, varying from day to day, season to season and year to year. Of course being outdoors can also confront children with less enjoyable experiences: being frightened, getting cold and wet, and even sometimes being hurt. But consider the alternative: that our children grow up without ever encountering these ‘difficult’ things, and enter the adult world unprepared for the challenges it might bring. This is why the mental health benefits of connection are just as important, if not more so, than the physical, although the two are of course inextricably linked: greater physical activity promotes better mental health, and a sedentary childhood leads to more mental health problems.”*
* Even SWT put posters up at Newlands Corner with pictures of children playing in natural surroundings, building dens and climbing trees, worded as follows *“Eben and Taro love making their castle in the woods from fallen branches and defending it from invisible enemies”* and *“Eben and Taro don’t need swings and seesaws when they’ve got a living playground just down the road”*

**Natural Play Sites**

We agree that children should be encouraged into the countryside, and luckily Newlands Corner already has lots of natural play sites. A few examples of these are shown in Appendix B, and there are many more. They do look remarkably like the artificial play structures designed by SCC’s architects Davies White, which would cost £210,000, but these are already there and cost nothing.

At Newlands Corner, children can for example

* Climb trees
* Clamber over fallen trees
* Swing from branches
* Explore hidden paths
* Build dens
* Roll down grassy slopes
* Invent their own games
* Look for wildlife – animals, birds, amphibians and insects
* Look for interesting trees, plants, seasonal flowers and fungi

We propose that the natural features of Newlands Corner are publicised more widely to families and children, using the historical name for the woodland of Fairyland.

**Visitor Facilities**

**Café**

The outdoor café is extremely popular with the people who go to Newlands Corner. The awning to the café could be extended to provide more undercover but outdoor space for people sitting outdoors, when funds are available. At Newlands Corner, this is where the vast majority of people want to sit – outdoors.

There is already an indoor café just across the road from the entrance to the site - only 10 metres away – from which the view from Newlands Corner can be seen but not obstructed. If it is felt that changes should be made to the offering of this indoor café, consideration could be given to SCC taking on the lease at some stage if it is available. The lease changed hands recently but SCC did not make an offer for it as far as we know. There is no point in building a huge new café when one is already there.

**Visitor Centre**

The outdoor cafe does not have indoor seating when it is cold or wet. Tables could be put in the Visitor Centre. The Visitor Centre would then be more widely used and the information supplied there more widely read. Also, it would not need to be manned, making a substantial cost saving.

**Education**

New material could be produced to appeal to children and young people with photos of natural play sites so that children can explore the countryside to find them.

Other material could include leaflets with photos of the birds, animals, butterflies, plants and trees found at Newlands Corner, so that children can tick off as many as they can find.

Small parties of children from schools that want to experience and enjoy a natural environment, could be encouraged.

**Trails**

The hard trail could be kept well maintained to be easily accessible for the elderly and disabled, and available also to those who like an easy walk or run, or do not want to get their feet muddy. It has not been well maintained in recent years. It could be resurfaced when it is necessary, and when the funds are available.

**Toilet Block**

The main focus for the toilets could be to ensure that they work and that they are clean all the time. Muddy boot marks, though, cannot be avoided in an outdoor space. We understand, from talking to people, that these appear to be the main gripes.

When funds are available, the toilet block could be given a limited refurbishment, then kept up to scratch on an ongoing basis.

**Children’s Play Area**

Consideration could be given to this area to try to make it into a more pleasant space, that more people use, suitable for families with children. Small pieces of suitable play equipment could be added to this area when funds are available (without borrowing or imposing parking charges) to keep children entertained while families are eating and drinking.

**Motorcyclists and Cyclists**

An attractive area should continue be made available to motorcyclists where they will not be cut off from visitors that arrive in other ways. Cyclists should also be given special consideration as needed.

**Other Issues**

**Wildlife and Conservation**

Wildlife should be valued and encouraged. Wild places, where species live, breed and feed, should be retained and protected as far as possible, so that the area can be shared between wildlife and people. Specialist groups should be consulted with regards to protected species.

Plants and trees should be valued in a similar way.

**History and Archaeology**

The history and archaeology of the site should be valued and protected. Specialists should be consulted where appropriate.

**Astronomy**

Light pollution should be kept to a minimum at night, as long as security is not compromised.

**Diversity and Equality**

All groups and income brackets of people should be considered. The disabled should be specially considered to ensure that they can enjoy the site.

**Working Together**

We would work with SCC, SWT and Albury Estate to ensure, where it is within our power, that the change is efficiently handled, and the ongoing handling of the site satisfies their reasonable expectations. We would particularly welcome any input by SWT, using their expertise, on matters related to conservation and education.

**Conclusion**

The current proposals by SCC and SWT have significant problems attached, in particular

* The majority of the public want Newlands Corner kept natural, beautiful and free, they do not want it spoilt and turned into a commercial tourist attraction
* There are already 255,000 vehicles a year using the site. The car park and road access cannot cope with any more
* The business case is fundamentally flawed. There will probably be no surplus left from expected parking charges, after paying the increased maintenance costs, to help fund the rest of the SCC countryside estate. There may even be a deficit, and there will also be significant financial risks involved
* The proposed investment costs of £400,000 are mainly to fund a play trail and parking charges, which are both unnecessary and unwanted
* The future maintenance charges under the proposed arrangements of £310,000 a year plus extra management costs and overheads are excessive in the extreme
* SCC wants to attract more children into the countryside. However, many families with children go there already, but are likely to go there less and for shorter periods if parking charges are imposed. Other groups of people, including the elderly and dog walkers and those who cannot afford the charges, are also likely to stop coming, with negative social and health impacts.

The Save Newlands Corner campaign group proposes a different way forward which would make Newlands Corner cost neutral to SCC within 2 years and would also take away the financial risks and management costs. This proposal includes

* Transferring the funding and the maintenance of Newlands Corner to a charity – the Friends of Newlands Corner
* Funds being raised under a ‘Friends of Newlands Corner’ banner to tap into the popularity of the site, although we believe it is reasonable for sufficient funding from SCC to continue for at least 2 years
* Keeping Newlands Corner natural, beautiful and free
* Publicising Newlands Corner as an exciting area with natural play sites, to encourage children into the countryside
* Putting in limited improvements that the majority of the public want

We look forward to receiving Surrey County Council’s response to our proposals. If, as we hope, it is positive, we will be happy to put forward a project plan for implementation.

**Sally Blake**

**Coordinator of the Save Newlands Corner Campaign Group**

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**7 May 2016**

**Appendix A**

**Costs in Current SCC/SWT Phase 1 Proposal**

These are the estimated figures quoted by SCC with as much detail as we have been given. SaveNC are querying some aspects of these, in particular the management and overhead costs

**Investment Costs**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Play trail | £210,000 |
| Parking charges infrastructure, refurbish toilets, resurface hard trail | £190,000 |
|  |  |
| Total | £400,000 |

This sum (£400,000) would be borrowed & paid back over 8 years out of the parking charges

**Current Maintenance Costs**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Visitor centre staffing (including volunteers at £50 a day) | £13,036 |
| Visitor centre utilities etc | £11,600 |
| Additional estimate for electricity & utilities | £5,000 |
| Visitors services, management/events, time on Newlands Corner | £23,125 |
| Annual repairs & maintenance of visitors centre | £4,667 |
| Annual car park repairs (estimate) | £5,000 |
| Amortisation of visitors centre refurbishment | £8,436 |
| Sinking fund for large scale repairs to car park & buildings | £14,000 |
| Management & overhead costs  | £72,136 |
|  |  |
| Total  | £157,000 |

This sum (£157,000) is to maintain and manage only the surfaced car park and visitor centre and toilet block

**Future Maintenance Costs**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Current maintenance costs | £157,000 |
| Increased staff costs | £14,000 |
| Operating costs of parking | £59,000 |
| Other costs such as rates | £25,000 |
| Depreciation & interest (assumed to pay back the £400,000 loan) | £55,000 |
| Additional management & overhead costs\*  | Not specified |
|  |  |
| Total | £310,000 plus \* |

This sum (£310,000 plus an additional unspecified amount for additional management & overhead costs) is to maintain and manage the surfaced car park and visitor centre and toilet block with added play trail and parking charges

**Appendix B**

**Examples of Natural Play Sites**

**already at Newlands Corner**

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**Appendix B continued**

**Examples of Natural Play Sites**

**already at Newlands Corner**

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