

## Thursley, Elstead, Ockley, Royal & Bagmoor Commons: The next stage of consulting on their future - A background paper

### Previous Consultation:

Between June and August 2010 Surrey Wildlife Trust in partnership with Natural England and Ministry of Defence/Defence Estates carried out an extensive consultation on the future management of the Commons. A full appraisal report, a background paper and a leaflet with details of the consultation events were made available on the Trust's website and distributed via e-mail, post and hand to a list of stakeholders including local, regional and national organisations as well as local groups and householders residing near or adjacent to the Commons. Householders and people who came to the events also received a questionnaire. Posters were put up on site, in car parks, on notice boards and in local shops, and a press release was sent to the local media to ensure wide publicity of the consultation and events. There were 2 grazing open days and 4 open days held on the Commons and 4 'drop-in days' held in local village halls which were visited by a total of 172 people and 106 questionnaires were completed and returned.

This enabled all the organisations to understand the uses and gain local people's views on the various options of managing the Commons. A detailed report on the results of the consultation can be found on the Trust's website but the main findings from the responses and questionnaires are as follows:

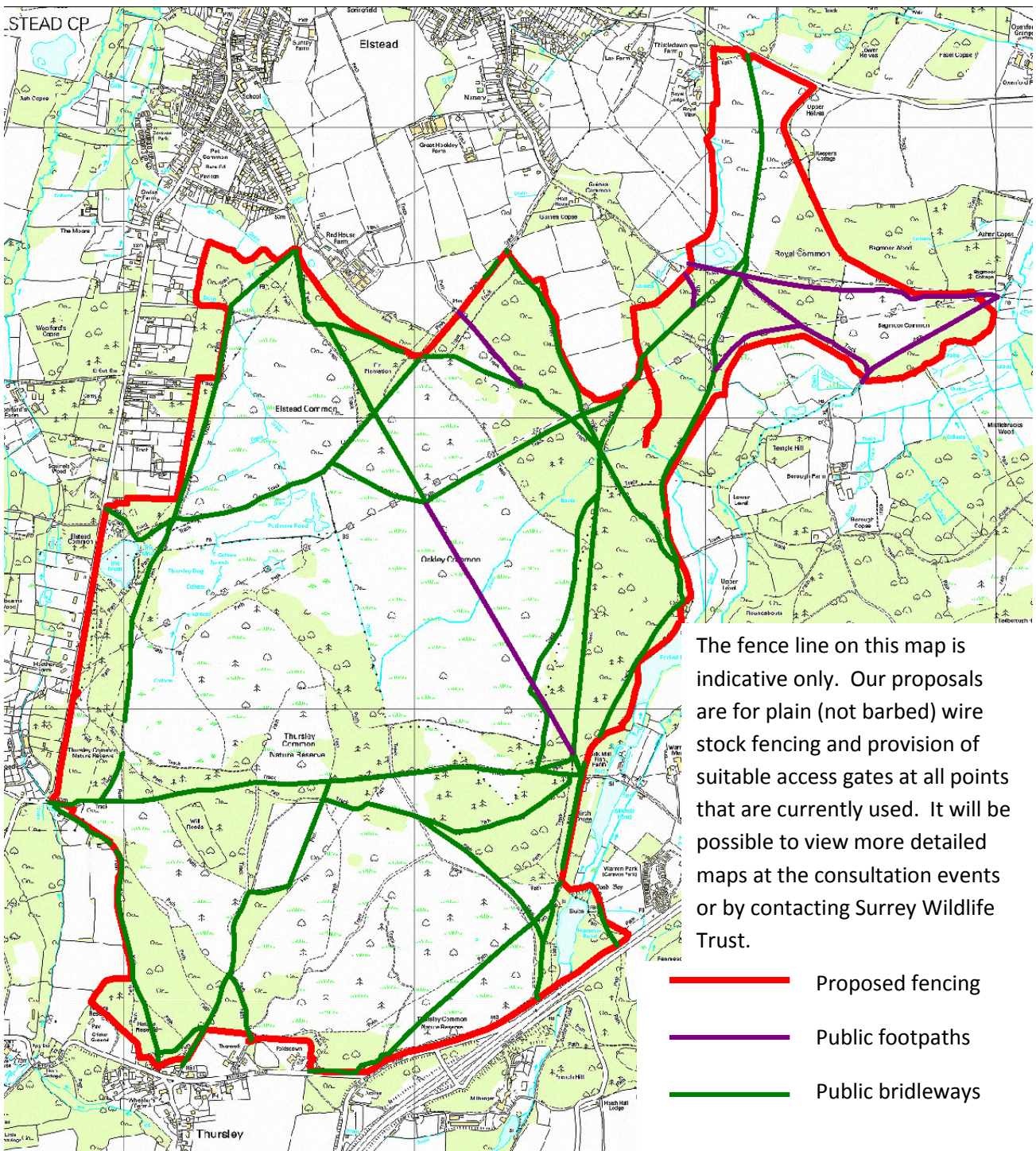
People mainly use the Commons for walking, frequently with a dog, followed by nature study, horse riding and jogging with similar numbers coming on foot and by car. For most visitors the Commons had several qualities which attracted them but the main points were peace and quiet, scenery, wildlife and ease of foot access as well as an appreciation of open views and wildness. Nearly half of the concerns expressed on the questionnaires were related to the activities of dogs with other concerns about the condition of paths and bridleways and disturbance to wildlife. About 75% were content with the current management for visitors and 70% were content with the management for wildlife. A majority thought that information provision and wardening were about right. There were also clear majorities in favour of the provision of dog bins at all the main car parks.

Regarding management techniques; 92% were in favour of summer grazing with just over 50% supporting burning and mowing but with fewer favouring turf-stripping. As for the type of livestock; most people favoured cattle or a combination of livestock rather than only ponies or sheep. There was a high level of uncertainty on the various options for controlling livestock which is perhaps why there were mixed and sometimes conflicting views, although, of those who expressed a preference, most preferred small fenced compartments above large temporary enclosures, shepherding and perimeter fencing. However, the MoD/DE has raised concerns about dividing the site with internal fences as they would pose difficulties and make it impossible to maintain operational flexibility for training needs. The MoD/DE accepts the desirability of grazing for heathland management and wishes it to be implemented on all areas of the Commons including those parts they use for military training. The MoD/DE accepts that a perimeter fence would be the most suitable and practical option as a means of containing livestock but cannot endorse any other fencing options on land which MOD owns or uses for training purposes.

### Our Proposals:

In light of the findings of the initial consultation and subject to further consultation, we propose the following actions:

- Set up a process of consultation with local people over future path maintenance.
- Continue to manage the Commons by a range of management techniques which includes scrub control, mowing, controlled burning, grazing and turf-stripping.
- Prepare a programme to clear trees and scrub encroaching upon the open heathland and manage areas of woodland and veteran trees in line with those areas currently under a Higher Level Stewardship scheme.
- Liaise with local people on the value of bare ground and how small-scale turf-stripping can be used to achieve this aim prior to the preparation of a plan for bare ground creation across all the Commons.
- Survey the condition of the heather and prepare plans for controlled rotational burning and cutting.
- Assess the extent of bracken and prepare plans for its control – where possible by cutting and bruising in preference to spraying.
- Continue rotational gorse management.
- Extend existing grazing primarily by cattle in spring, summer and autumn, starting at about one animal per 15-20 hectares (equivalent to a total of 35-50 cattle for 8 months) and look into the option of using ponies to graze all year round, to be varied in the light of experience.
- Install permanent perimeter fencing with all access points maintained (see outline maps overleaf: larger scale maps can be viewed at the events listed below or by contacting Surrey Wildlife Trust).
- Set up a strategy to monitor the effects of all the management techniques.
- Conduct a visitor survey in 5 years time.
- Regular communication with users of the Commons, local people and organisations to ensure that current issues and concerns are known so management actions can be taken accordingly.



## Consultation events

<b>Thursley Village Hall -</b>	<b>Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> July</b>	<b>10am-4pm</b>
<b>Elstead Village Hall -</b>	<b>Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> July</b>	<b>10am-4pm</b>
<b>Milford Village Hall -</b>	<b>Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> July</b>	<b>9am-1pm</b>
<b>Royal Common Car Park -</b>	<b>Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> July</b>	<b>10am-4pm</b>
<b>Royal Common Car Park -</b>	<b>Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> July</b>	<b>10am-4pm</b>
<b>Shackleford Village Hall -</b>	<b>Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> July</b>	<b>9am-1pm</b>
<b>Thursley Common Moat Car Park -</b>	<b>Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> July</b>	<b>10am-4pm</b>
<b>Thursley Common Moat Car Park -</b>	<b>Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> July</b>	<b>10am-4pm</b>

For more information please visit the Surrey Wildlife Trust website: [www.surreywildlifetrust.org](http://www.surreywildlifetrust.org) and direct any enquiries to Zoe Grainger at Surrey Wildlife Trust, School Lane, Pirbright, Woking, Surrey GU24 0JN or e-mail [Zoe.Grainger@surreywt.org.uk](mailto:Zoe.Grainger@surreywt.org.uk)

**We would welcome your views by 31<sup>st</sup> July 2011**