

PORTFOLIO: LEISURE

CABINET – 6 JANUARY 2003

HAMPSHIRE PATHS PARTNERSHIP

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In 1998 the Council allocated £9,000 a year for three years as a partnership project with Hampshire County Council and the Countryside Agency. The scheme was to provide specific resources to improve the use of the rights of way network in the District.
- 1.2 This stemmed from a view held by a number of agencies that more needed to be done to encourage provision and use outside the Forest itself. At that time the study by the University of Portsmouth had shown that the majority of people using the Forest were from the surrounding towns and villages. Subsequently this has been re-inforced by a Citizen's Panel survey. It has also been a specific work programme item for the New Forest Committee.
- 1.3 It is now in its third year and the request has come from HCC to continue the partnership for a further term to re-inforce and build on the progress made to date

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Hampshire Paths Partnership scheme run by the County Council evolved from the initial scheme promoted by the Countryside Agency and aims to promote local path networks through practical tasks with volunteers and providing local communities with help towards publicising local paths and walks. The Council has been working in partnership with HPP over the last three years and has been active across these themes:
 - 2.1.1. Working with local communities to encourage greater use of public rights of way within and immediately adjacent to settlements – keep paths open, make improvements above the minimum statutory requirements, create new links, publicise the network and create local involvement in the stewardship of the paths. This is achieved particularly through practical tasks with local volunteers. Work has also focussed on the development and promotion of short Healthy Walks, based partly on the Rights of Way network.
 - 2.1.2 To help to establish links between settlements and access to the Forest
 - 2.1.3 To make connections between key routes that exit / enter the District, linking to adjacent authorities and settlements.

3. SCOPE

- 3.1 The investment by the Council has allowed the employment of a specific post to work with Town and Parish Councils as well as directly with the community.
- 3.2 There are a number of specific things the project has achieved over the last two years:
 - 3.1.1 The first authority to work with HCC and the Health Authority to introduce “Healthy Walking” routes in three settlements- Marchwood, Hythe and Fawley through the development of three short circular routes within each area. The use of the routes is now being evaluated with a view to introducing it to other settlements.
 - 3.1.2 Practical project work in seven town and parish council areas, a number using volunteers including path surfacing, step building, major clearance work and bridge improvements. The close liaison between the Project Officer, Rights of Way Officers at HCC and parishes, has enabled other work, which has been identified, to be carried out by the Rights of Way Section.
 - 3.1.3 Made connection with the Castleman Trailway that reaches our border with East Dorset and as a result HCC are looking to make a connection between Ringwood and this route. This is an action that has been an aspiration in the Local Plan for more than a decade but now has its best ever chance of progressing.
 - 3.1.4 New contacts have been made with the Forestry Commission and initiatives are now planned in the Waterside area to make better use of the limited public rights of way network in that area.
- 3.3 This approach of working with local communities has given the project a national profile and led to its support from the Countryside Agency. As with most development work, a sound basis has been laid but there is a great deal more to do and areas to extend into.
- 3.4 This project is very much about information and promotion as well as physical works. It does help improve the standards of some routes and may indeed lead to the creation of new ones. It is not however related to the statutory requirements of HCC or landowners to maintain Public Rights of Way.
- 3.5 The essential idea behind this project is as relevant today as it was when first introduced. In fact with the advent of the Local Strategic Partnership this is just the sort of scheme that brings agencies together to do practical work to tackle local issues. As well as continuing the themes of the current project, there is scope to combine this work with public transport issues and funding and access related initiatives being developed by the Countryside Agency’s Integrated Access Development Programme.

- 3.6 There are sufficient funds in the specific budget for this work. However, as with all schemes involving the use of Developers' Contributions, there are criteria for assessment. Notwithstanding the slightly different nature of this scheme; the relevant comments relating to criteria are as follows:-

The comments of the Planning Service are:

This scheme will use funds obtained for general environmental improvements. The scheme will provide for informal recreational activity, particularly in areas where substantial new development has taken place. As such, it is an appropriate use of these funds.

The comments of the Leisure Service are:

- (a) Can the scheme be shown to meet the needs of the people in the development area?

Yes. There has been substantial population growth in the District and visiting the countryside has been shown by research to be an activity pursued by a high proportion of people.

- (b) Does the scheme complement or improve existing or planned facilities in the catchment?

Yes. This type of provision makes best use of current facilities and will offer new opportunities. These will complement site-based facilities.

- (c) Can a request be accommodated within the funds available, given the known and anticipated requirements within the area for which contributions are held?

Yes. Funds are retained for other schemes.

- (d) Is the proportion of funding from contributions reasonable, given the nature of the scheme?

Yes. This scheme will be an important addition to usable open space. Partnership funding spreads the costs and makes best use of resources.

- (e) Is there financial need on behalf of the promoter of the scheme?

Yes.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The previous partnership funding was allocated from developer's contributions that are held for general application across the District. This project was seen as a good way to mitigate the impact of increased local population numbers on the Forest. Also it was providing new opportunities and not setting out just to restrict.

- 4.2 The request is for the continuation of the scheme on the same basis as before – that is £9,000 per annum for three years. There is sufficient funding available to meet this expenditure. It does not affect the allocations for individual parishes, and meets a significant need.
- 4.3 This level of funding would be matched by HCC, who would remain the employing authority and therefore bear those additional costs and responsibilities.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Consultation is a key part of this programme and to date work has been done with the help of Copythorne; Fawley; Hythe and Dibden; Marchwood Milford on Sea; New Milton and Ringwood Town and Parish Councils, who have all been supportive of the scheme. Other organisations, which have participated in the scheme, include the Forestry Commission, Greenlink (SE Dorset rights of way project), NHS Specialist Health Promotion, volunteer groups and many landowners.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 This programme involves local communities in the stewardship of their environment and thereby encourages a sense of pride in the local area. It helps to improve the environment locally to settlements, cut down on the number of car journeys and reduce impact on the Forest.

7. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Increasing access can lead to local issues to do with crime and disorder but these are considered as part of the assessment of any route. This is also counter balanced by the opening up of dark and overgrown existing pathways, which might be appealing to criminal or anti social behaviour. Well-used paths can also help towards keeping a watch on an area.

8. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS

- 8.1 The Leisure Portfolio holder supports the scheme and the allocation.

9. RECOMMENDATION

- 9.1 It is recommended that the continuation of the scheme be supported and the sum of £9,000 per annum for three years be allocated from developer's contributions for the District as a whole.

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Background Papers:
None

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