

Langport Cycleway (Executive Decision)

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Purpose of the Report

To update Members on the progress of work with local representatives regarding the future management of the Langport to Muchelney Cycleway and ask Councillors to consider the awarding of a grant of £10,000 towards the costs of purchasing a section of the cycleway and capital improvements along its length.

Public Interest

The Langport to Muchelney Cycleway is currently maintained by the SSDC Countryside Service and annual licence fees, payable to two sets of landowners, have been paid from SSDC budgets. Reduced capacity and efficiency savings within council services have prompted the need to identify a local solution for the ongoing management of the cycleway and to ensure its future sustainability. Following consultation with the local community, SSDC officers have been working with representatives from Huish Episcopi Parish Council, Langport Town Council, Drayton Parish Council and Muchelney Parish Meeting to agree a forward plan.

Recommendations

1. That Councillors note the report, particularly the financial and in-kind support offered by the local community to ensure the sustainability of the Langport to Muchelney Cycleway.
2. That a grant of £10,000 be awarded to Langport Town Council (as lead authority for the Consortium of Huish Episcopi Parish Council, Langport Town Council, Drayton Parish Council and Muchelney Parish Meeting) towards the purchase of a section of the Langport Cycleway and improvements to infrastructure. The funding to be allocated from capital reserves.

Background

The Langport Cycleway is a 2.5km stretch of gravel surfaced amenity route, formerly part of the rail network. The route is in two parts both of which cross privately owned land; access agreements were originally set up in 1998 between the land owners and SSDC to allow public access on foot, bicycle and horseback as part of the River Parrett Trail project.

To date, the budget for the licenses and maintenance has been found by the Countryside Service, however, increased pull on resources and reduced budgets mean that this position is not maintainable in the long term.

Report

The Cycleway crosses the parishes of Huish Episcopi and Drayton but benefits communities from surrounding settlements, particularly Langport and Muchelney and a public consultation in 2017

showed the continued popularity of the cycleway amongst businesses, the local community and visitors to the area.

Officers from the Countryside and Area Development Services have been working with representatives from Huish Episcopi Parish Council, Langport Town Council, Drayton Parish Council and Muchelney Parish Meeting to develop an agreement for the future management of the route and to ascertain the level of work required to improve and repair the cycleway to bring it up to a satisfactory condition for handover. In addition, the owner of the first section of the route has agreed to sell his holding. A budget for the land purchase and improvements has been identified as a funding target for the group.

The consortium has agreed that Langport Town Council will be the lead authority for the group and, as such, will take on the ownership of the first section of land and act as licence holder for the second section. Langport Town Council will also have responsibility for insurances, risk assessments and maintenance agreements while the other partners will contribute to annual payments through the precept and/or local fundraising.

Project Costs

Capital costs:

Land Purchase	£10,000
Repairs and Improvements	£4,000
	£14,000

Funding Plan

Officers will continue to work with the group to support their funding target of £4,000, this will be through a mixture of external funding and requests to local businesses, neighbouring parish councils and the community.

Funding Source	Amount	Status
Tesco Bags of Help	£2,000	Application to be submitted
Local fundraising	£2,000	Pending
Amount requested from SSDC	£10,000	To be agreed

Annual revenue costs

Current licences are due to expire in September for section one, and December for section two. Projected costs for the remainder of 2018 plus new agreements for 2019 and associated maintenance costs would require an annual budget in excess of £4,000.

The purchase of land would be seen as an “invest to save” strategy, reducing annual costs for licences. Voluntary support and engagement of the Community Payback Team has been proposed as a way of reducing maintenance cost. With this in place, it is anticipated that the community group could reduce the annual costs to about £1,500, which will be met by contributions from the two parishes where the cycleway is situated, Huish Episcopi and Drayton.

Financial Implications

There is currently £188,959 unallocated in capital reserves. If Councillors agree to the recommendation, there will be £178,959 remaining.

Corporate Priority Implications

Council Plan – Economy

- Capitalise on our high quality culture, leisure and tourism opportunities to bring people to South Somerset.

Council Plan –Health and Communities

- Help people to live well by enabling quality cultural, leisure, play, sport & healthy lifestyle facilities & activities.

Carbon Emissions & Climate Change Implications

As an off road walking and cycling route the Langport Cycleway offers a safe route for green leisure and commuters to Langport and Huish Episcopi, helping to reduce carbon emissions.

Equality and Diversity Implications

The access to the Langport Cycleway includes gateways that can be opened enabling all-mobility vehicles to make use of the route. Gateways were tested at installation with a range of specialist bicycles and mobility vehicles to ensure the route was accessible for everyone.

Background Papers

Langport Cycleway – Report to Area North Committee, 25 April 2018.
