

## **Transfer of responsibility for pathways and footbridge at Cockle Moor, Langport**

*Executive Portfolio Holder:* Cllr, Ric Pallister, Leader, Strategy & Policy  
Cllr Henry Hobhouse, Property and Climate Change

*Assistant Director:* Donna Parham, Assistant Director (Finance and Corporate Services)

*Lead Officer:* Charlotte Jones, Area Development Manager(North)

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### **Purpose of the Report**

The purpose of this report is to seek approval to transfer the District Council's ownership and maintenance responsibilities for two footpaths and a linked pedestrian bridge all at Cockle Moor, Langport together with a one-off payment of £5,000 to Langport Town Council.

### **Forward Plan**

This report appeared on the District Executive Forward Plan for February 2016.

### **Public Interest**

SSDC has responsibility for two pathways and a footbridge at Cockle Moor, Langport. These facilities are well used by the local community and visitors providing accessible 'all weather' routes away from the main street between different parts of the town. Langport Town Council may shortly acquire the full ownership of Cockle Moor from the Environment Agency and if so, has proposed to take over responsibility for the pathways and footbridge to simplify (and reduce the overall cost of) ownership. The town council has requested a one-off grant of £5,000 from SSDC towards future upkeep. This request has been considered and is recommended for approval by the Executive.

### **Recommendations**

That District Executive:

1. Authorise the Assistant Director (Finance and Corporate Services) and the Assistant Director (Legal and Corporate Services) to secure the transfer of full future ownership and maintenance responsibility for the two pathways and footbridge as indicated on the plan at Appendix A by early determination of existing leases or other arrangement to achieve that outcome together with the payment of one-off grant of £5,000 from General Fund Balances on completion to Langport Town Council.
2. Note that the Town Council's request is subject to the successful acquisition of Cockle Moor from the Environment Agency.

### **Background and costs of ownership.**

Cockle Moor is a large area of open space bordering the River Parrett as it runs through Langport. It is a special place to the local community well used for recreation, fishing, picnics, river access for boating, and community events. It includes a public right of way and an important part of the River Parrett Trail.

In 1993 the District Council entered into a licence agreement with the National Rivers Authority, now the Environment Agency, to create a footpath and footbridge link between SSDC Stacey's Court and Cocklemoor public car parks in Langport. This is at a peppercorn rent with full maintenance responsibility. In 2005 SSDC installed a 'all ability' pathway following the flood bank linking the town centre to the Westover Trading Estate as part of a broad regeneration for the town on similar terms with the Environment Agency. The cost of this path was around £15,000 plus officer time to design and supervise the works.

In the last 2 -3 years the town council funded improvements – including refurbishment of the SSDC pathways – as part of a local programme 'Walk Langport'- using external grant funding, the Community Payback (Probation) service and the local precept. Estimates for work if undertaken by SSDC were between £7,500 - £15,000 depending on the materials used.

A plan showing the pathways and footbridge is attached at Appendix A.

### **The proposal – a future option for ownership and maintenance**

The town council may shortly acquire the full ownership of Cocklemoor from the Environment Agency and if so, has proposed to take over responsibility for the pathways and footbridge to simplify ownership.

The town council has requested a one-off grant of £5,000 from SSDC towards future upkeep.

### **Benefits to the community**

These assets are not viewed as strategic to the council, but are of considerable local benefit to residents and visitors. It is important to seek a sustainable (affordable and long term) solution to maintain these benefits.

The paths provide 'all weathers' links across Cocklemoor using safe, accessible routes from one end of the town to the other. These provide both circular walks, easy access to the countryside, and a means to avoid sections of the narrow busy main street.

The town council has been negotiating with the Environment Agency to acquire the freehold transfer of Cocklemoor to the community. Taking on the full responsibility for the various facilities including the paths would assist the community in maintaining and building on the significant community / visitor benefits of Cocklemoor for the future. Overall this proposal will help ensure that decisions on the future of an important local asset are made as locally and as simply as possible.

### **Benefits to SSDC**

Within the council, operating budgets are not available to fulfil the maintenance liabilities (planned or reactive) which accrue for example to meet the risk of vandalism. Responding to local or third party requests, queries or complaints and ensuring that the relevant insurance, leases, licences or easements are in place and observed can incur significant officer time. In other words whilst the direct costs of maintenance can appear low, costs can still be incurred. A lack of regular maintenance over time can lead to higher costs in the long term.

The ward member for Langport and Huish Episcopi strongly supports the recommendation.

### **Conclusion**

Overall this proposal has benefits from both a community and corporate perspective, and the requested one-off grant of £5,000 appears reasonable. This will help the town council bear the costs of maintenance for the future, recognises their past contribution and simplifies local management arrangements of an important community asset for the future.

**Financial Implications**

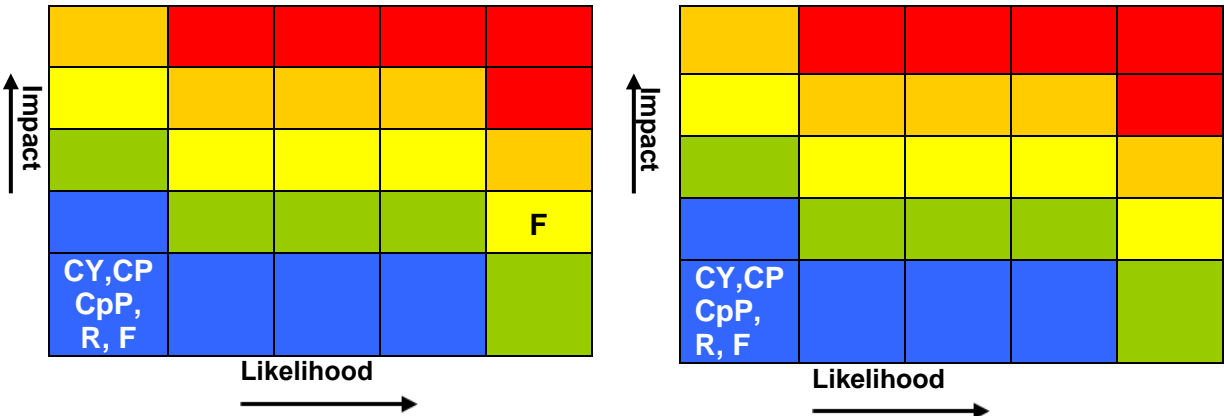
If members agree the recommendations set out in this report £5,000 will be found from General Fund Balances to fund the grant.

The Area Development Manager (North) has indicated that if an internal recharge for Legal Services time to complete the paperwork is required, this can be met from existing budgets in Area North to help further local community priorities for promoting visitor facilities to the Langport area.

**Risk Matrix**

**Risk Profile before officer recommendations**

**Risk Profile after officer recommendations**



**Key**

Categories	Colours (for further detail please refer to Risk management strategy)
R = Reputation	Red = High impact and high probability
CpP = Corporate Plan Priorities	Orange = Major impact and major probability
CP = Community Priorities	Yellow = Moderate impact and moderate probability
CY = Capacity	Green = Minor impact and minor probability
F = Financial	Blue = Insignificant impact and insignificant probability

**Council Plan Implications**

Focus Four – Health and Communities – Maintain and enhance the South Somerset network of leisure and cultural facilities optimising opportunities for external funding to promote healthy living.

Asset Management Plan (a key council strategy) – Action:- Dispose of, transfer or develop buildings and land that do not contribute to the council’s strategic outcomes or have an economic importance.

## **Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications**

None from this report.

## **Equality and Diversity Implications**

The town council have prioritised improved community access and funded work to address barriers to access SSDC assets where budgets were not available. Transferring full responsibility will help ensure accessibility of the pathways and bridge is well maintained for the future.

## **Privacy Impact Assessment**

N/A

## **Background Papers**

Letter from Langport Town Council dated 14<sup>th</sup> October 2015

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