

Area North Committee – 26th September 2007

10. Waterlinks Update

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Sylvia Seal Leisure, Culture and Well-being
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Purpose of the Report

To provide an update report on the progress of the Waterlinks programme.

Recommendation

That members note the report.

Background

“Waterlinks” is a programme whose collective aim is to help unlock the economic, social and environmental potential of our Somerset waterways and wetlands, helping to make it a true ‘Living Landscape’ to be celebrated and enjoyed by local communities and visitors alike.

The Waterlinks programme has been developed jointly by Somerset Waterways Development Trust, Somerset County Council (co-ordinator), Taunton Deane (including Project Taunton) Borough Council, South Somerset, Sedgemoor and Mendip District Councils. The current estimated value of the Waterlinks programme is approximately £75 million of capital investment over 5 to 7 years from January 2008.

Fundamental to the programme is a bid to the Big Lottery for £50 million. The first stage application was successful, which brought an offer of £500,000 of programme development funding to Somerset. This has been spent on a variety of feasibility studies and programme management.

The programme includes 21 projects, grouped into six project groups – four by geographical areas in Somerset (Langport, Bridgwater, Taunton and Glastonbury) and two by project type (navigation and multi-user pathways).

Further details of the programme, including the South Somerset based projects is included in Appendix A.

Report

The main achievements over the past 3 months are as follows :

- The second stage application to the Big Lottery was submitted by 31st May. This included a series of 7 - 8 documents (prepared by each delivery partner) for each of 21 projects, plus documents which summarized plans and financial information into the six programme groupings. Finally the second stage application form was completed by Somerset County Council, together with a host of programme level

documents including risk registers, communications and stakeholder plans, budgets and programme governance.

- The package of documents was audited by consultants to the Big Lottery (Halcrow) during a 2 day intensive visit to Somerset in early July. Members of the project teams, consultants and officers for the County and other delivery partners were questioned on the detail within and behind each of the documents.
- A revised communications plan has been agreed, with a public relations company handling media relations and other work. The Waterlinks team has supported a number of events, including the Bath & West, Glastonbury Extravaganza and forthcoming River Festival. Public support is positive and awareness steadily increasing. Publicity material for posters, leaflets and exhibitions is now available, although there is very limited finance with which to work. A number of sponsors are being sought, to support the final few weeks of the campaign.
- A presentation to Full Council by the Chairman of the Waterlinks Steering Group. Publicity material has been distributed to all parishes and members. The official website is linked to all district and county websites.

Planned activity – September – December

- Implement local communications plans. Activities by SSDC include an exhibition at the Langport & River Parrett Visitor Centre, publicity material (posters, leaflets etc) sent to a wide variety of public offices, visitor centers and attractions, schools. We will also work closely with the central Waterlinks team, and the Somerset Waterways Development Trust, to promote local awareness and build up support for the vote. As the weeks progress, and *subject to Waterlinks getting through to the public vote*, publicity (particularly through email) will intensify.
- A final presentation by Lord Ewen Cameron to the Big Lottery Board in October, in support of Waterlinks. The Lottery Board then makes its final decision to put each of the six finalists through to the public vote.
- Filming starts by ITV – to make a short promotional film for each of the six national finalists. Langport has been selected for inclusion within the Waterlinks film, due to the combination of the river access, variety of local community projects and landscape.

Further details on the Waterlinks programme are available from the lead officer, and through the official programme website: www.waterlinks.info

Financial Implications

None

Implications for Corporate Priorities

- To increase economic vitality and prosperity
- To improve the health and well-being of our citizens

Other Implications

Waterlinks will contribute to the objectives of the following:

- Area North Development Plan
- Langport Area Vision (MCTi - 2002) and draft Area Community Plan (2006) Langport Area Tourism Strategy (2005)
- Martock Area Community Plan (2007)
- Somerset / South Somerset Tourism Strategies
- Somerset Levels and Moors Leader+ business plan
- Sports Strategy (increased activity levels)
- River Parrett Trail

Background Papers: *Reports to Area North Committee – December 2006, September 2006, April 2007.
Report to District Executive – January 2007.*