

AN

Area North Committee – 19th December 2007

14. Somerset Waterlinks – Programme Review

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Purpose of the Report

To provide an update report on the current status of the Waterlinks programme and make recommendations for the Councils continuing involvement following the Big Lottery decision to not support the funding bid to the Living Landmarks programme.

Recommendation(s)

That Members endorse the following recommendations to District Executive when reviewing the Councils continuing involvement with the Waterlinks programme:-

- That SSDC expresses support for the values and vision of the Waterlinks programme, and works with partners to the agreement to revise the programme, and corresponding agreement if still required, for further consideration at a later date (timescales to be agreed)
- That the current allocation to the Waterlinks programme within the Corporate Capital Programme is retained, according to the revised proposals from the Head of Area Development (North), with detailed scheme proposals to be submitted by August 2008

Background

“Waterlinks” is a programme whose collective aim is to help unlock the economic, social and environmental potential of the Somerset waterways and wetlands, helping to make it a true ‘Living Landscape’ to be celebrated and enjoyed by local communities and visitors alike. The vision for the programme is based around ‘making more of water’, learning from and celebrating the past, whilst shaping a more sustainable future.

The Waterlinks Partnership is currently reviewing the future of the programme, including the ambitions of partners and stakeholders to maintain Waterlinks in its current form. Due to the nature of the programme (21 projects, some with several elements within them), there are many ways the projects could still be delivered, either in partnership as now.

This report provides a basis for discussion by members of the Area North Committee as part of the review process.

The Waterlinks programme – background

The Waterlinks programme has been developed jointly by Somerset Waterways Development Trust, Somerset County Council (co-ordinator), Taunton Deane Borough Council (including Project Taunton), South Somerset, Sedgemoor and Mendip District Councils. An agreement was signed by all partners in September 2006, which established a framework for programme development and decision making.

The total estimated value of the Waterlinks programme is approximately £75 million of capital investment over 5 – 7 years from January 2008 - fundamental to this was 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.

SSDC committed £321,000 in the corporate programme, pending the result of the Big Lottery bid, in February 2007.

In October 2007, the Big Lottery unexpectedly announced that the Somerset Waterlinks was unsuccessful in progressing to the final public vote in December 2007.

Current structure of Waterlinks

The programme includes 21 projects, grouped into six project groups – four by geographical areas in Somerset and two by project type (navigation and multi-user pathways). Several of the projects include more than one element, for example the multi-user pathway projects included 5 separate schemes across Somerset.

Each partner has taken responsibility for one group of projects, commissioning feasibility work, community and stakeholder consultation and project development.

South Somerset District Council hosts the 'Southern Moors' project group. The lead officer is the Head of Area Development (North), and the member representative is Councillor Sylvia Seal, Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Well-being.

What has happened since the loss of support from BIG?

Letters of thanks have been written to sponsors, and supporters and enquiries from the press and public dealt with. The Waterlinks email address and website are being maintained. Dedicated resources for programme management and administrative support have ended.

The partnership as a body have requested that each partner considers its future support to the programme, which projects should be included, and future financial and other commitments. The next meeting of the project managers will be before Christmas, with a subsequent steering group meeting in January 2008.

For the South Somerset projects, and those which are planned within the district, informal discussions have taken place internally and with partners as to the outcomes of feasibility work, the value placed on the project being delivered anyway, and future commitment to the overall programme. The results of these discussions are set out below, and will form the basis of recommendations to District Executive, in considering the future of the Waterlinks allocation within the corporate capital programme.

Members comments are invited on the summary of progress towards each project of distinct interest to South Somerset and recommendations for future development including involvement with the Waterlinks programme.

The summary is included in Appendix A, and the recommendations for further links to the Waterlinks programme, and financial support from SSDC are shown below.

Project	Recommendation
Martock – Langport Cycleway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain financial allocation • Seek partner support to continue project development and secure match funding • Propose to retain within Waterlinks programme, or new programme for Somerset's trails and rights of way improvement • Further discussion with SCC to determine best delivery model
Waterways / navigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain financial allocation for river access and activity for the Langport Vision, led locally in partnership with Environment Agency and the Langport area River group • Propose to support inclusion of Navigation project within Waterlinks but reviewed to include the SCC Waterways Advisory Committee to develop the vision for navigation and access of the Somerset waterways
Industrial Heritage (Parrett Works conservation and regeneration programme)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain financial allocation • Seek partner support (eg SWRDA) to continue project development and secure match funding • Propose to remove from Waterlinks programme to be delivered locally, in partnership with local residents, and the Martock Community Planning Partnership or through wider heritage based programme
Hydropower Mills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain financial allocation and transfer lead to Environment Directorate • Propose to support inclusion of Somerset wide Hydropower Mills project within Waterlinks, if continued, although the actual mills identified to continue via alternative delivery if possible
Ecology and Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No financial allocation within DX programme • Continue to promote and support one off locally led environmental schemes, use of grants programme and in kind officer time • Consider future allocation for local sustainability / low carbon projects – transfer to Environment Directorate • Propose withdrawal of project from Waterlinks, for possible inclusion with other environmental / conservation programmes in future
Langport Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain financial allocation (and enhance from Area Capital Programme – Langport Access) • Seek partner support and secure match funding, led locally in partnership with Environment Agency and the Langport area River group, Langport Town Council, Huish School and the Warehouse Trust • Propose to withdraw specific small scale elements from Waterlinks programme, and develop others (e.g. the Visitors Centre) as part of the emerging vision for the Levels and Moors through the Rural Action, and World Heritage Status applications process

Financial Implications

Recommendations would include developing projects to draw down on the Area North Capital Programme, subject to future detailed capital appraisals.

The financial implications for the Corporate Capital programme to be determined by District Executive.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

8. Work in partnership with the public and private sector in developing and delivery of the Market Towns Vision
9. Identify and address the particular issues affecting rural areas
11. Work in partnership to improve the health benefits for all
18. 80% of residents and businesses satisfied with the quality of the local, natural and built environment by 2012
19. To have SSDC as one of the top exemplar councils in the country reducing CO2 emissions by 2012

Other Implications

The delivery of the combined projects, have a range of local outcomes, specifically aimed for in a number of strategies and action plans:

- Martock Area Community Plan
- SSDC Health & well-being strategy
- SSDC Tourism Strategy
- Langport Vision 2020 and draft community plan
- SCC Rights of Way Improvement Plan
- Leader+ business plan and draft Rural Action bid

Background Papers: *Reports to Area North Committee – December 2006, September 2006, April 2007, September 2007.*
Report to District Executive – January 2007.
Variety of bid documentation.
www.waterlinks.info