

Joint Area North Committee – 25th February 2009

13. Area North Service Enhancement Programme – 2008/09 (Executive Decision) (Excepted Business)

Head of Service: Charlotte Jones, Head of Area Development (North) (SSDC)

Lead Officer: Charlotte Jones, Head of Area Development (North) (SSDC)

Contact Details: Charlotte.jones@southsomerset.gov.uk or (01458) 257401

Purpose of the Report

To seek an allocation towards enhancing services for local access projects, as identified by parish & town councils, and Parish Paths Liaison Officers, in conjunction with the SSDC Countryside Service.

Recommendation(s)

That members approve an allocation of £15,000 for local access projects (with priority on the public rights of way network), from the Area North Service Enhancement Programme 08-09, to be managed by the acting Head of Countryside, Heritage and Tourism, with local enhancements agreed in conjunction with Parish Councils and Parish Paths Liaison Officers.

Background

The Area North Service Enhancement Programme, was agreed by District Executive as part of the budget settlement for 2008-09. The total value of the programme is £40,000, and is designed to be allocated against local priorities for service enhancements. To date, two themes of work have been almost completed:-

- £10,000 towards streetscene services (see report January 2009)
- £10,000 towards local community safety projects

In addition two themes each had £10,000 carried forward from 2007-08, completed last summer providing additional activities and support to older people and younger people.

£20,000 remains (£5,000 earmarked for environmental work, leaving £15,000)

Report

The variety of projects supported through the Area North Service Enhancements during 2008-09 has received very positive feedback to date and a final evaluation will take place later this year.

In May 2008, a meeting of local Parish Councils placed local rights of way as the top service area from SSDC for making Area North a good place to live. Promoting local access to the countryside, for enjoyment and tourism, and the development of rights way to reduce the need to drive, or for health benefits is a key priority for the Area Development Plan 2008/09.

The SSDC Countryside Team maintain approximately 600 miles of rights of way, under a delegated agreement with Somerset County Council. Limited funding is available to develop rights of way over and above essential maintenance work.

A recent survey of parishes, together with ongoing work to develop local solutions to access problems has revealed a variety of small local projects to make a difference to local communities.

Three such projects are included in Appendix A, as examples of the types of projects that can be delivered with relatively small amounts of funding.

No additional financial implications will be incurred, any future maintenance falling within the scope of existing budgets. Projects will be completed in the usual manner, either by local contractors, or by the Countryside team, or in conjunction with local volunteering teams.

Following discussion with the acting Head of Countryside, Heritage and Tourism, and the Parish Paths Development Officer, it is proposed to allocate £15,000 to facilitate a range of small scale access improvements across Area North, based on local priorities.

Following the success of the streetscene programme, a similar mechanism is proposed – the budget will be allocated to the Head of Service for authorising spend, in collaboration with the local parish council (and Parish Paths Liaison Officer).

The work should be completed by the end of June 2009, and will be publicised direct to Parish Councils, in addition to the results of the recent survey conducted.

In addition to a series of small scale access improvements, the allocation will support the training and support to volunteers who work locally to maintain parish paths.

The Area Support Team Leader will monitor the progress of the scheme on behalf of Area Development, linking with the relevant officers of the Countryside service.

Financial Implications

£5,000 was allocated to environmental work, and £15,000 to 'local initiatives' in July 2008. Allocating £15,000 to local access improvements, will leave £5,000 for 2008-09 towards further local initiatives, or to be reallocated.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

Promoting local access to and involvement with the rights of way network supports the following key target areas.

3.27 – Increase access to services and facilities by public transport, walking and cycling.

3.19 – Increase ...adult participation in sport and active recreation

4.26 – Increase participation in regular volunteering

Other Implications

Local rights of way networks are often used to promote tourism.

Background Papers: *Area North Service Enhancement Programme reports*
