

11. Turn Hill – Parish Lengthsman (Executive Decision)

Strategic Director Rina Singh, Place and Performance
Assistant Director Martin Woods, Communities
Report Author and Budget Holder: Charlotte Jones, Area Development Manager (North)
Service Manager: Chris Cooper – Streetscene Manager
Contact Details: chris.cooper@southsomerset.gov.uk or (01458) 257401

Purpose of the Report

To seek a financial contribution from SSDC towards the proposed partnership between SCC, SSDC and a group of Area North parishes, to set up and operate a Parish Lengthsman Scheme covering the Turn Hill ward and associated villages.

Public Interest

A group of parishes in Area North are seeking the support of South Somerset District Council to help form and operate a Parish Lengthsman Scheme, in the Turn Hill area.

This report provides the details of the proposed scheme and a recommendation to support the proposed scheme, and make financial contribution to its costs.

Recommendation

- (1) Approve up to £5000 per year for three years from the Area North Service Enhancement budget, a total of £15,000, as part of a new partnership with the Turn Hill parish group and Somerset County Council, for the new Turn Hill Parish Lengthsman Scheme. The first years' allocation to come from the Area North Service Enhancement budget 2009-10.
- (2) Subject to recommendation 1, the award to be made to Long Sutton Parish Council, as the accountable body for the scheme, subject to satisfactory reviews at the end of year one and two, and subject to the availability of annual budgets, from each partner, and all subject to conditions based on SSDC Corporate Grants policies.
- (3) Subject to recommendation 1, to authorise the Area Development Manager to sign an appropriate grant agreement, with the support of the SSDC Streetscene Manager, Chairman of Area North, and ward member for Turn Hill, on behalf of SSDC. The comments of the Streetscene Manager, and any related requirements from SCC Highways, will be considered, and where necessary included within the agreement, which form the basis of the annual review.

1. Project Name: Turn Hill – Parish Lengthsman Scheme – 2010-13

2. Organisation applying / contact name and address

Long Sutton Parish Council (as accountable body for the proposed scheme)

3. Project description

The proposal is to establish and operate a new Parish Lengthsman Scheme in the Turn Hill ward and nearby area. The funding required will allow a self-employed contractor to

work with the area, including the provision of transport and tools as part of the contract. The contract will be held by Long Sutton Parish Council, who in turn will administer the overall work programme on behalf of all funding partners through means of an partnership agreement.

Evidence of need for this project:

The group of parishes have identified additional work required over & above current service levels by SSDC and SCC. In a rural area the build up of debris and soil can quickly lead to drainage problems. Maintaining clean pathways, litter free open space and clearing back overgrowth all affect local resident satisfaction. Small improvements can make a great deal of difference to people's satisfaction with the local environment, and the safety and accessibility of different public facilities.

One particular advantage of a Parish Lengthsman is the ability to develop and use local knowledge, and act rapidly to address small problems from becoming worse. One example is the need to keep roadside grips clear, to help minimise the risk of flooding events.

Evidence of Support:

The Service Managers for SCC Highways (Richard Groves) supports this project, which will adapt the current successful schemes in South Petherton and the Cokers (tailored to the local circumstances). Somerset County Council – will commit up to £5,000 per year for 3 years, and the service manager has confirmed this budget is in place. Somerset County Council will also provide all the safety training and equipment for the first year and will contribute to some tools for the Lengthsman.

The project's recent development has been coordinated by the Ward Member for Turn Hill (Rupert Cox), following ideas developed as a result of the Long Sutton Parish Plan. A workshop for the relevant parishes was held in January 2010, which led to the request for SSDC support.

- The parish councils for each parish will be an active partner to the scheme, including annual financial commitments from the parish precept. The parishes have discussed the following points:
 - Costs estimated on 220 days per year
 - Clear line management through the coordinator
 - Also have joint project management team
 - Time allocations to each Parish against their investment
 - Parish choose what the Lengthsman does around their village
- Long Sutton has agreed to act as the accountable body, through the appointment of an administrator, who has also been identified.

Comments from Chris Cooper – SSDC Streetscene Manager:

The Lengthsman scheme offers a number of practical benefits for the Parishes involved in the schemes, and I'm happy to help with this wherever possible:

- 1 - The ability for local people to action local needs (mainly on small jobs, such as painting a bench, cutting back an overgrown corner, etc) which are irritating & in reality too small for County or District to prioritise - such jobs otherwise get done -

sometime when we have free time. This does lend itself to great customer satisfaction for the scheme.

2 - The Lengthsman can provide a very fast response to local needs - the administrator simply prioritises the Lengthsman's work for the day / week.

3 - The Lengthsman develops in depth local knowledge which is really useful when dealing with local drainage matters for example, or a specific road junction is always difficult to tackle as the vegetation grows much faster in that place & therefore they can increase maintenance frequencies on a very localised basis to prevent problems arising.

4 - The Lengthsman scheme is much more cost effective compared to contracting all these small works

The main ways to ensure a successful scheme, have been developed from prior experience of similar schemes, I recommended these be actively considered at part of setting up the scheme, these include: -

1 - You must have an excellent Administrator & Lengthsman to make the system work - these are key players. I cannot overemphasise this!

2 - The work of the Lengthsman must be clearly accountable to the funding bodies & each parish to ensure that each partner contributing feels they are getting value for their contribution

3 - The Lengthsman needs to be qualified to carry out 'public works' – this would need to put in place, and should be made clear within the tender process.

4 - Disposal of waste is always expensive & will require a carrier's licence, so arrangements will need to be made regarding this aspect of the work

5 - A joint annual review should be carried out & report produced to demonstrate the value / market the success of the scheme / formally ID problems & plan to tackle these.

6 - Also it should be noted that the payment to the Lengthsman needs to be inflated annually and the contract has to be long enough & secure enough for a quality person to commit to it - It will be their employment (in real terms) so it is essential that the individual is 'looked after'.

Project start and end date (and what happens after that)

This proposal covers the start up phase as part of a three year agreement between the funding partners.

By agreement, the scheme could end (other than a provision for redundancy costs) with no ongoing financial implications.

Project costs & funding

The cost of a Parish Lengthsman Scheme is determined by the nature of local demand, and the availability of financial resources. The proposal formed at the parish workshop to discuss forming a scheme, considered a target budget of £20,000, on the basis of £5000 from SCC, £5000 from SSDC, and £10,000 from the parish group. This is in keeping with the ratios used in the two other South Somerset Schemes, and at around £90 per day, would provide up to 220 days per year of active service.

Aller - £1000	= 2days per month = 22 days/yr
Pitney £1,000	= 2 days per month = 22 days/yr
Long Load £1,000	= 2 days per month = 22 days/yr
Long Sutton £3,500	= 7 days per month = 77 days/yr
High Ham £3,500	= 7 days per month = 77 days/yr

Note: The organising group are also consulting Huish Episcopi Parish Council to establish their support in supporting Wearne and Coombe - £1,000 which could reduce the contribution from Long Sutton and High Ham to £3,000 each.

Summary and conclusion - Area Development Manager (North)

Based on the advice of the Streetscene manager, a three-year contract held by the parish group would be the most effective way of determining this scheme's success and making a measurable contribution to the local community.

Should the scheme be approved for financial support and SSDC involvement through the Streetscene Services, then it is concluded that this should also be made with three year agreement, subject to satisfactory reviews at the end of year one and two, and subject to annual financial commitments from each partner.

The comments of the Streetscene Manager, and any requirements from SCC Highways, should be considered, and where necessary included within the contract tender process, and three-way agreement between funding partners.

SCC is the lead authority for Parish Lengthsman Scheme, partly due the responsibility for safe working on or near the highway. Together with the scheme administration managed by the parish group, the staffing implication for SSDC in addition to its financial contribution is minimal, and to a significant extent, involvement with the scheme would be routine work for the Streetscene service – promoting local community engagement.

The Parish Lengthsman Scheme as proposed, already operating successfully in the South Petherton and Cokers areas, appears to offer SSDC considerable benefits, and in turn will make a difference to the local communities involved. This service should not be regarded as a replacement or duplication of core services, but an enhancement, and is recommended for support through the Area North service enhancement programme.

Financial Implications

There is currently £20,000 left in the Area North Service Enhancement Programme 2009-10. Approving £5000 will leave £15,000 until the end of March 2010. Future years could be met from the Area North Grants budget or Service Enhancement budget. The applicants to be made aware that offers of financial support cannot be formally made until the confirmation of SSDC budgets in February of each year.

Corporate Priority Implications

- 2.0 Outcome: An enhanced natural environment
- 3.0 Outcome: An enhanced built environment

- 3.18 Outcome: Individuals and communities enjoying healthier and more active lifestyles.
- 4.0 Outcome: A community that feels safe
- 5.0 Outcome: A successful council delivering services valued by residents

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)

Equality and Diversity Implications

Fair recruitment and selection procedures, including a requirement for reasonable measures to be taken to remove barriers to work or training, as part of the appointment of contractors, should be included within the agreement for this scheme,

Background Papers: Information on the Somerset Parish Lengthsman Scheme
