

Area North Committee – 29 January 2014

10. Consultation - Draft Vision for the Levels and Moors

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Purpose of the Report

For members to discuss the draft Vision for the Levels and Moors, issued by the new Levels and Moors Task Force for consultation, and to consider endorsing the vision as detailed or to provide additional comments.

Public Interest

Following the floods in 2012, a Somerset Levels and Moors Task Force was proposed by a wide range of local interest groups (at a round table event in November 2012) to develop a shared sense of purpose and direction for the Levels and Moors with effective agreements on managing the often complex relationships between people, land and water.

Recommendation

That members comment on the draft Vision for the Levels and Moors, and consider endorsing the Vision or provide additional comments.

Background

Members will recall that at the Area North Committee in June 2013, a funding request towards the administrative costs of the Somerset Levels and Moors Task Force was agreed. It was resolved at that meeting that a report would be made back to the Committee when a draft vision document was available.

The following information has been received by way of background to the draft vision:-

A Round Table meeting was held in November 2012 to consider the future of the Somerset Levels and Moors. It was agreed at that meeting that a 'Vision' of what the area might look like in 20 years time should be sketched out, to be accompanied by an action plan for achieving it.

A 'Task Force' was set up, drawn from all of the main interest groups, charged with preparing a draft Vision, which would then be subject to the widest possible discussion and consultation, with the aim of building the broadest possible base of support for what is trying to be achieved.

The draft is now available for comment and is attached as Appendix A. It has been intentionally kept to one side of A4. Its key points are:

1. The Levels and Moors will look much as it does now;
2. Most of the land will remain in extensive, wildlife-friendly grassland farming;
3. Rivers, rhynes and the upper catchment will be managed in such a way that flooding, whilst still a regular event, is less of a threat to domestic property and transport links and is confined as far as possible to the winter;
4. Green tourism will be making a significant contribution to the local economy;
5. Wetland wildlife interest will be even richer and more diverse than it is at present, including an increase in bird numbers;
6. Farmers and landowners' incomes will be supplemented by payments for providing so-called "eco-system services" such as habitat management, flood storage and carbon sequestration.

Comments on the Vision would be valued, either as an individual, or from the Area North Committee, ideally before the end of January when the Task Force next meets but, failing that, as soon as possible thereafter. The sooner we can agree where we want to be going, the sooner we can set in train the actions needed to take us there.

Comments should be made by email to Anthony Gibson, acting Chairman Levels and Moors Task Force anthony.gibson@googlemail.com

Financial Implications

£1000 has already been allocated as a partnership contribution to support the production of the vision, from the Area North Reserves.

Council Plan Implications

Focus Two – Environment – We will - "Continue to support communities to minimise flood water risks."

Focus Four - We will "...work with communities to develop plans for their community."

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)

None from this report

Equality and Diversity Implications

None from this report

Background Papers: *Area North Committee Report – 26 June 2013 – Somerset Levels and Moors Task Force*