

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Conservation Advisory Group
Conservation, Sustainability &
Community Planning Portfolio Holder
meeting.

AUTHOR/S: Conservation Manager

8th December 2004

Outline of the work of the Wildlife Trust in South Cambridgeshire and consideration of possible enhanced partnership working

Purpose

1. To outline the activities of the Wildlife Trust within the district and present a proposal for enhanced partnership working with SCDC, including consideration of a request for funding support to support their work.

Martin Baker – Senior Conservation Officer – Wildlife Trust for Beds, Cambs, Northants and Peterborough will make a presentation on this item.

2. Effect on Corporate Objectives

Quality, Accessible Services	Creating access to appropriately managed wildlife space is a key action of the Community Strategy (Action 22) and is one of the Council's Performance Indicators (SP901).
Village Life	The creation of improved access to the countryside and managed wildlife areas makes a significant contribution to enhancing village life.
Sustainability	The Wildlife Trust make a substantial contribution to achieving sustainability by providing a viable means managing wildlife space.
Partnership	The report proposes the development of increased partnership working.

Background

3. *Nature Reserves as Accessible Natural Greenspaces*
The Wildlife Trust manages 14 nature reserves across the district, including some of the most important wildlife sites in the county. Twelve of these have open access to the general public and they are well visited by local people as well as Wildlife Trust members and natural history experts. The Wildlife Trust, therefore, manages over 300 hectares of accessible natural greenspace for the benefit of wildlife and local people, making a sizeable contribution to recreational opportunities within the district.
4. Further, there are several other nature reserves in neighbouring districts that will also be visited by residents of South Cambridgeshire. Local Wildlife Trust managed nature reserves include : Hayley Wood; Buff Wood; Gamlingay Wood; Gamlingay Cinques; Gamlingay Meadow; Overhall Grove; Over Railway Cutting; Mare Fen LNR; Hardwick Wood; Shepreth L-Moor; Thriplow Meadows; Beechwoods LNR Fulbourn; Lower Wood.

5. In addition, as part of the planning agreement for the management of open spaces at Cambourne, the Wildlife Trust will manage all the woodlands, the eco-park and other areas of semi-natural habitat.
6. The Trust has an active reserve acquisition policy which in South Cambridgeshire is focussed on extending and linking their woodland reserves as part of the prospective development of a "*Forest of South Cambridgeshire*".

Considerations

7. *Nature Reserves management.*
Annually the Wildlife Trust spends over £50,000 on managing the above sites in South Cambridgeshire (excluding the costs of managing the open spaces at Cambourne). Funding is required for : staff costs; conservation management; interpretation, and expenditure to ensure that the nature reserves are accessible and safe for visitors. This is funded through membership subscriptions, private sponsorship, Lottery funding, charitable trusts and government grants.
8. The Wildtrust are requesting the establishment of an initial 3 year Service Level Agreement with SCDC to contribute £5,000.00 (10%) towards the costs of maintaining the Wildlife Trust nature reserves, as an accessible local resource for local people. This is not a service that can be provided by the Ecology Officer or the Rangers at Milton Country Park and would, therefore, be additional work to enhance biodiversity in the district.

Members views are sought on this proposal.

9. **County Wildlife Sites**
The Wildlife Trust is currently managing a slimmed down County Wildlife Site system for Cambridgeshire. County Wildlife Sites, together with Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are the most important wildlife habitats in the district. Their protection and favourable management is essential to achieving many of the targets within the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biodiversity Action Plan.
10. As part of their statutory duties local authorities need to ensure that their local plans and other strategic documents are based on up-to-date information . Therefore, PPG9 paragraph 24 states :

"Nature conservation issues should be included in the surveys of local authority areas required by sections 11 and 30 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to ensure that the plans are based on fully adequate information about local species, habitats, geology and landform."

A programme of County Wildlife Site surveys is an essential element of ensuring that the local authority bases its plans on accurate and reliable biodiversity information. This information is likely to be required within the forthcoming Biodiversity Strategy.

11. Within South Cambridgeshire there are currently 106 County Wildlife Sites, with potentially more sites to be identified as a result of changes in land use or management. Of the 106 County Wildlife Sites currently identified, 30 are within and 76 outside the Green Belt project area. The Green Belt Project, as part of its agreed work programme, organizes management work and liaises with landowners on selected County Wildlife Sites.
12. The Wildlife Trust propose to complement the Green Belt Project's practical site work through a rolling programme :

- a. of survey and re-survey of County Wildlife Sites.
- b. management of the County Wildlife Site administrative systems
- c. provision of management advice to owners

Examples of recent work undertaken include management statements prepared for the County Wildlife Sites at East Hatley churchyard and the disused railway at Bourn Golf Club.

13. Ideally grassland, marsh and fen sites should be monitored every 5 years, while woodland and open water sites should be monitored every 10 years. Within the district, the Wildlife Trust proposes the survey or re-surveys of 15 County Wildlife Sites per year, resulting in a rolling programme of re-surveys over a period of 7 years. Where requested management advice will be provided to all owners contacted.
14. Opportunities for other countryside enhancement projects or other work will then be passed on to relevant organisations such as the Green Belt Project or FWAG, through their Cam Catchment Sustainable Farming Project.

The Wildlife Trust are therefore proposing establishment of an initial 3 year Service Level Agreement to pay for a rolling programme of County Wildlife Site surveys and re-survey. The survey would aim to complete the survey of 15 sites annually. The cost of such work would be £2,500.

Members views are sought on this proposal.

15. *Wider Countryside Projects (BAP Habitats & Species Work)*
The Wildlife Trust plays an active role in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biodiversity Partnership, through managing projects, chairing working groups and providing expert advice. Key projects include :
 - Hosting the Green Belt Project for the past 12 years.
 - Hosting and providing line management to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Water Vole project.
 - Co-ordination of a study to identify opportunities for linking ancient woodlands across the area.
 - Promotion of the “Forest of South Cambridgeshire” as a strategic open space west of Cambridge.
 - Promotion of development of significant strategic open space south and east of Cambridge, within South Cambridgeshire.
16. *Planning*
The Wildlife Trust complements the work of the South Cambridgeshire District Council Ecology Officer and thus helps to promote nature conservation through the planning process. In particular the trust are currently :
 - Contributing to the development of landscape and biodiversity policy for the new settlements.
 - Providing monitoring and management advice on Fen Drayton Nature Reserve (through a Section 106 planning agreement).
 - Contributing to the examination of the Cambridge Guided Bus scheme (The Trust have objected on the grounds that the scheme will destroy an important wildlife corridor through the district , as well as severely damaging at least one County Wildlife Site).
 - Investigating enhanced mitigation and compensation measures in the event of the guided bus being approved.

17. *Community*

The Wildlife Trust supports the development of practical community involvement in natural heritage by :

- Supporting local member groups activities including walks, and talks,
- Supporting local *Watch Groups* who organise activities for young people.
- Developing a *People and Wildlife Team* who work to ensure that every young person has formal contact with the Wildlife Trust, through one of our education centres, and therefore gain a nature experience, during their school career.
- Organising seed collecting, planting and community hay making events at Gamlingay Wood, involving the local community and families in particular.

The Wildlife Trust's work in these last three categories in South Cambridgeshire adds up to over £35, 000 per year. It is not proposed that these form part of the Service Level Agreement.

18. The management of wildlife reserves is clearly a core activity of the Wildlife Trust and which makes a significant contribution to the enhancement of access to the countryside for local people. However, members will be aware that resources are currently under close scrutiny and consequently an establishment of a Service Level Agreement (via an expansion in the budget) will need to be justified as being of direct connection to the Council's core objectives and priorities.

Options

19. The Conservation Advisory Group are asked to consider the value and implications of establishing a 3 year service level agreement with the Wildlife Trust and either :

- (i) Recommend that the Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning Portfolio Holder seeks additional funding within 2005/06 to support a three year service level agreement to contribute a total of £7,500 per annum to the Wildlife Trust's work on both managing wildlife sites and surveying County Wildlife Sites.
- (ii) Decline to recommend that the Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning Portfolio Holder seeks additional funding within 2005/06 to support a three year service level agreement due to current pressure on resources.
- (iii) Recommend that the Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning Portfolio Holder expresses support for the work of the Wildlife Trust and establishes a prioritised study of County Wildlife Sites (CWS) for an initial one-year pilot from 2005/06, funded from the *Heritage Initiative Fund* with results reported to the Conservation Advisory Group by February 2006.
- (iv) Subject to the results of the pilot CWS study that the Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning Portfolio Holder seeks additional funding within 2006/07 (*via a Continuous Improvement Plan bid*) to support a potential three year service level agreement to support the Wildlife Trust's work on both managing wildlife sites and surveying County Wildlife Sites.

Financial Implications

20. At present the Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning Portfolio contributes some £11,000 p.a to the Green Belt Project and £5,100 p.a to the Cambridgeshire Biodiversity Partnership, both of which have connections with the work of the Wildlife Trust. However, the Council does not currently make any direct

funding contribution to the work of the Wildlife Trust, other than via the Corporate membership and grant support for individual projects (via the Wildlife Enhancement Scheme).

21. There is currently no budget allocation which would enable a 3 year service level agreement to be established, consequently additional or re-allocated resources would have to be identified. Given the budget timetable it is considered that the earliest this could be achieved would be 2006/07 via a *Continuous Improvement Plan* bid in 2005/06.

Legal Implications

22. None specific. Support for the Trust would be entirely discretionary.

Staffing Implications

23. None specific. The work of the Trust will complement the Ecology Officer's work.

Risk Management Implications

24. None specific.

Consultations

25. None specific. This report is the first stage of the consultation exercise on this proposal.

Conclusions/Summary

26. Given the current pressure on resources and the need to clearly prioritise funding on project delivery, it is considered that the potential for closer partnership working with the Wildlife Trust could be initially developed via the establishment of a pilot survey of targeted County Wildlife Sites. These would be sites identified with the Ecology Officer, with the aim of complementing other project work and departmental priorities. This could be funded by re-allocating, existing resources within the Heritage Initiative Fund, subject to the portfolio holder's approval.
27. Subsequent reporting of the results of this initial pilot scheme, work would then inform the development of a case to potentially create or re-allocate resources for a future project working. Members will be aware of the constraints on resources and consequently the development of new funding, therefore it is important that support for the Wildlife Trust is seen in the context of the entire budget allocation.

Recommendations

28. That the Conservation Advisory Group considers the potential to develop closer working with the Wildlife Trust and :
 - (i) recommends that the Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning Portfolio Holder expresses support for the work of the Wildlife Trust and establishes a prioritised one-year pilot study of County Wildlife Sites (CWS) from 2005/06, funded from the *Heritage Initiative Fund*, with results reported to the Conservation Advisory Group by February 2006.

- (ii) Subject to the results of the pilot CWS study that the Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning Portfolio Holder seeks additional funding within 2006/07 (*via a Continuous Improvement Plan bid during 2005/06*) to support an appropriate three year service level agreement to support the Wildlife Trust's work on both managing wildlife sites and surveying County Wildlife Sites.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Letter to SCDC from Martin Baker at the Wildlife Trust - 23rd August 2004

Contact Officer: Nick Grimshaw – Conservation Manager
Telephone: (01954) 713180