

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

**AUTHOR/S:** Conservation Manager

8<sup>th</sup> December 2004

### Parish Paths Partnership (P3) – progress and support in 2005/06.

#### Purpose

1. To consider continued funding support to the Parish Path Partnership (P3) scheme within South Cambridgeshire from 2005/06 and for a period of three years.

#### Effect on Corporate Objectives

2. Quality, Accessible Services	The P3 scheme contributes to the enhancement of the districts rights of way and thereby access to local facilities, services. This accords with <i>Community Strategy Actions 16 &amp; 18</i> which focus on improving access to local facilities.
Village Life	The P3 scheme contributes to the quality and accessibility of the RoW network. In particular much is being done to improve access, for the less able by surface improvements as well as replacing stiles with kissing gates. This accords with <i>Community Strategy Action No. 22</i> which focuses on increasing access to the countryside.
Sustainability	The P3 scheme encourages a healthier lifestyle through walking and riding, in accordance with <i>Community Strategy Action No.4</i> . By improving car free access, the scheme makes a contribution to sustainability by encouraging the use of the footpath network to work, shops/facilities, and school etc.
Partnership	The P3 scheme encourages village participation by means of direct public involvement along with social interaction through organized walks and local guides. In addition, P3 is an example of a well established partnership between the parish, district, and county councils which works to improve access and enhance the local environment.

#### Background

3. The P3 scheme operates within all 4 districts within the County. Grant funding from the district councils support work on the ground with those constituent parishes which are signed up to the partnership. The aim is to improve, maintain, and promote their local Rights of Way network. Within South Cambridgeshire some 40 parishes are signed up to the scheme in 2004/05, and it is intended to work with that number in succeeding years.
4. The P3 scheme has been in operation in Cambridgeshire since 1988 and subsequently became a Countryside Commission (Agency) initiative adopted by some 27 counties in England. The County Council administer the scheme, and since 1998 the District councils have supported the scheme via annual grant support

which goes to those participating parishes to improve local access. SCDC currently supports the scheme with a contribution of approx. £16k per annum.

5. The County council also provide direct financial input through revenue and capital works within these parishes alongside the officer involvement on the ground in addition to the grant works undertaken by the parish.

### **Considerations**

6. Recent and currently ongoing work (04/05) undertaken by 'P3 parishes' in South Cambridgeshire includes :
  - the improving of access by replacing stiles for kissing gates in Caxton, Guilden Morden , Bourn , Stow-cum-Quy, Hildersham, Comberton, Bassingbourn.
  - Surface improvements at Meldreth,Litlington, Longstanton.
  - Leaflet production in Toft, Orwell.
  - Waymarking in Coton, Meldreth .
  - Sign improvements in Orwell.
7. During the coming year (05/06) the aim is to improve access for the less able in all participating parishes, in particular at Steeple Morden,
8. The P3 scheme currently has a district-wide coverage. Working with a broad spread of parishes enables a large number of villages to benefit from improved access to the countryside at the very local level, via a range of projects from the relatively modest to more significant works. Projects rely on parishes bringing forward initiatives and are not usually targeted.
9. It has been suggested that the scheme could be more targeted, focusing funding onto a smaller number of 'strategic' projects, to reflect the objectives of the Community Strategy. Such an amended approach would channel funding into a smaller number of parishes but offer support for the development of key new strategic sites. Such schemes would include Coton Countryside Reserve or even new projects, such as the development of the Ashwell Street/Ickniel Way ancient route as a linear park.
10. However, given the established effectiveness of the scheme, it is considered that funding support for more focused strategic open space projects, particularly those relating to the development of the district, should be considered to be 'additional' to the P3 scheme. This would mean retaining the broad focus of the scheme while seeking linkages and parallel funding partnerships to support such strategic initiatives, including the release of S.106 funding.
11. If SCDC were to withdraw from the initiative, the County would continue to implement its statutory duties to maintain the rights of way but the local input would be greatly reduced and also the many 'partnership' enhancement benefits diluted or lost.

### **Options**

12. The Conservation Advisory Group are requested to consider the following options :

- a. To recommend that the Portfolio Holder confirms continuation of funding support to the Parish Paths Partnership (P3) scheme for a further 3 years from 2005/06 at the current grant figure.
- b. To recommend that the allocated funding is focused into targeted individual parish schemes or projects.
- c. To recommend continued support for the P3 scheme for a further 3 years from 2005/06 at the current grant figure, with additional funding sourced to support 'one off' enhancement paths projects in individual parishes.
- d. To recommend that SCDC ceases to support the scheme and develops alternative countryside access enhancement schemes.

### **Financial Implications**

- 13. SCDC support funding for the P3 scheme is currently allocated within the Conservation budget at £16,800 for 2004/05. It is considered that, in order to continue to implement this very effective scheme that support for the P3 scheme should remain at an equivalent sum, of approximately £16,000 pa for the next three years.
- 14. It is considered that potential development of a mid-term financial strategy, with confirmation of committed funding over a longer period will enable the scheme to be developed such that linkages can be developed with strategic scale projects, as well as assisting realise parish led initiatives.

### **Legal Implications**

- 15. The scheme does not impose any legal implications on the District. The County Council are the Highway Authority, responsible for maintenance of the majority of the sites.

### **Staffing Implications**

- 16. None specific. The County Council staff administer the project in consultation with the Conservation Manager.

### **Risk Management Implications**

- 17. None specific.

### **Consultations**

- 18. None specific.

### **Conclusions/Summary**

- 19. The Parish Paths Partnership scheme has proved to be both effective in both improving the rights of way network and involving local people in countryside enhancement. It is well received in the parishes and the number participating has increased annually. It achieves improvements on the ground with local involvement and prioritisation. Enables parish, district and county councils to work together on improving local access which meets both corporate objectives and helps deliver the action of the Community Strategy.
- 20. The Conservation Advisory Group and Portfolio Holder are, therefore, asked to confirm further support to the P3 scheme for the next 3 year period, subject to

availability of resources. as it offers direct support to a large number (40) of parishes as opposed to just one parish/scheme.

21. With increasing development pressure in the district the scheme helps protect access to the countryside as well as encouraging wider access where development is permitted.

### **Recommendations**

22. That the Conservation Advisory Group confirms their continuing support for the development of the Parish Paths Partnership (P3) and :
  - a. Recommends that the Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning Portfolio Holder authorises continuation of funding support to the Parish Paths Partnership (P3) scheme for a further 3 year period from 2005/06 at the equivalent of the 2004/05 grant sum, subject to establishment of the Council's mid-term financial strategy.
  - b. Recommends that the Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning portfolio Holder instructs the Conservation Manager to seek to develop linkages between the P3 schemes and strategic open space projects which will both enhance the network and meet the objectives of the Community Strategy.

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

Parish Paths Partnership New Bulletin – 2003/04 – Autumn 2004.

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