

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

AUTHOR/S: Conservation Manager

8th June 2005

THE FARMLAND MUSEUM AND DENNY ABBEY - PROGRESS ON THE ON-GOING DEVELOPMENT SCHEME AND FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR VISITOR FACILITIES ENHANCEMENT AS PART OF THE PROJECTED GREEN & CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE.

Purpose

1. To advise members of the progress of the development scheme initiated by the Community Development Portfolio Holder and the then Conservation Portfolio Holder in 2003/04 and seek support for the next stage of the enhancement scheme and the proposed funding bids to external grant bodies.

The Curator of the Farmland Museum & Denny Abbey will make a presentation on this item.

Effect on Corporate Objectives

2.	Quality, Accessible Services	By enhancing both physical and intellectual access to the district's heritage the Museum contributes to meeting targets set out in the Council's performance plan 2005/06, specifically : BV170a – museum visits per 1000 pop; BV170b – museum visits in person per 1000 pop; and BV170c – pupils visiting museums/galleries in school groups.
	Village Life	The museum celebrates and interprets the heritage and village life of South Cambridgeshire, and thereby contributes to meeting the objectives of the Community Strategy and its actions No. 9 (engagement in social, cultural development) and No. 11 (life long learning). Further, the proposed further development of the museum as a 'visitor hub' will include increased countryside access, (as part of the district's green infrastructure) potentially creating new west-east linkage to the River Cam and thereby contributing to implement Community Strategy Action 22 (accessible countryside).
	Sustainability	The museum both helps preserve and makes a sustainable use of historic buildings, which are consequently managed and maintained for the benefit of the community.

Partnership	The Council's funding support (under the Museums Grant) enables significant partnership funding to be levered by the museum from national heritage bodies and is expected to be included in the emerging <i>Green Infrastructure Strategy</i> to enable further partnerships to be developed to both draw financial support and facilitate countryside access.
-------------	--

Background

- Since 2002, the Farmland Museum has been working with SCDC on developing the Denny Abbey site, to incorporate it better into the museum's story. A development scheme was drawn up in 2003/04 with support and funding from the Community Development and Conservation portfolio holders and English Heritage. This has been continued into 2004/05 with an additional grant from the Conservation Portfolio Holder's budget (*Heritage Initiative Fund*). This has enabled the museum to concentrate on enhancing this joint curatorial role with English Heritage.
- The development scheme was initiated in recognition of the need to improve the interpretation of the former abbey and unify the two sides of the site, in partnership with : English Heritage; CCC; the Heritage Lottery Fund; and SCDC during 2003/04.
- The following table outlines the development project's priorities that were recognised as necessary to be addressed.

Priority 1 Research, and development of more accessible interpretation material, panels and dressed sets.	Priority 2 Erection of dressed sets and launch enhanced site story.	Priority 3 Parking and site signage improvements.	Priority 4 Development of new visitor entrance and access.	Priority 5 Development of living exhibitions of medieval life and farming.
---	---	---	--	--

- The following table outlines the key priority 1 & 2 components and project costs :

Priority component 1, 2	Funding contributors.	£Cost	Year
(i) New guidebook for the entire site.	English Heritage	£4, 000	2003/04
(ii) Coordinated orientation boards across the site.	English Heritage	£8, 000	2003/04
(iii) New interior and exterior interpretation panels	SCDC (<i>Conservation - HIF</i>)	£5, 000	
(iv) Time line feature detailing the evolution of the site.	Cambs. County Council	£2, 000	
(v) Set dressing & lighting, focusing on three contrasting periods.	English Heritage (L.M.A)	£8, 000	2004/05
(vi) Interactive displays.	SCDC (<i>Conservation – HIF</i>) Lottery (Awards for All)	£10,000 £ 5,000	
Total Cost		£44,000	
	SCDC Contribution	£15,000 (34%)	

- Priorities 1 and 2 outlined above have been achieved.

8. The next stage of the development programme involves working towards and achieving priorities 3, 4 and 5.
9. A feasibility study is being commissioned by the Museum in 2005 to :
 - clarify the components of priorities 3, 4 and 5.
 - explore ideas for the next stages of development, including linkage to the sub-regional Green Infrastructure Strategy.
 - provide a clear strategy for ensuring the longevity of the Museum.

The brief for the feasibility study will form the basis of the Curator's presentation.

Considerations

10. The Farmland Museum Trust now looks after Denny Abbey for English Heritage under a local management agreement (although building maintenance costs remain with English Heritage). This has created significant opportunities for the development of the visitor attraction and the agricultural story of the district.
11. It will be evident from the continued growth of the museum since 2002 that the development programme is working. The 2004/05 season has been particularly successful, enhancing the museum's role as a significant tourist attraction. Well over 12,000 people visited the site, of which 2,500 were school children.
12. The museum growth experienced in 2004/05 focused on the school and lifelong learning events, and was particularly impressive in terms of the children's activity days. This shows a steady climb in numbers, attributed to : the improvements in marketing and publicity which have resulted from the development programme; the work of the education outreach worker; and the encouraging results of special events which have been effective in drawing repeat visits.
13. Further work is needed to realise the full visitor potential of the museum site and in particular its potential as a 'visitor hub' to explore the countryside (and thereby a target for the Green Infrastructure Strategy) and its historic relationship with the former abbey. This will include the potential offered by the Growth Area fund.
14. *Museum as Countryside 'gateway'.*
It is, therefore, proposed as part of the feasibility study to explore the potential to provide a new 'gateway access' from Denny Abbey & The Farmland Museum, into the open fen-edge landscape. This will create an enhanced visitor hub at the museum, which will link key heritage and recreational attractions within the Cam Valley. Such an enhanced physical and intellectual access into the fenland landscape offers the potential to create east-west linkages to the River Cam and via Upware to Wicken Fen.
15. Clearly significant funding would be required but this might be accessible via the growth area fund, if the objectives are accepted as part of the Green Infrastructure Strategy.

The key project aims would then be :

- To provide an enhanced visitor hub, including transport facilities and an orientation centre at the Denny Abbey & The Farmland Museum site,
- To establish approximately 1.5 kilometres of new safe off-road, east-west bridleway/cycleway/footpath routes from the A10 to enhance the existing Rights of Way network to : Waterbeach; Upware and Wicken Fen and provide a new focus for strategic countryside access development.

- To further develop publicly accessible linkages and the potential of existing key heritage assets in the Cam valley.
16. It is hoped that the results of the feasibility study will be able to be reported to members before the end of the calendar year.

Options

17. The Conservation Advisory Group are requested to consider the above and the presentation and either :
- (a) Recommend that the portfolio holders for Community Development and Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning continue to support the on-going partnership development programme at the Farmland Museum & Denny Abbey and invite the Curator to present the results of the feasibility study at their respective portfolio holder's meeting by December 2005.
 - (b) Recommend that the portfolio holders for Community Development and Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning support the potential of the museum to be developed as a 'countryside gateway' within the proposed Green Infrastructure Strategy.
 - (c) Decline to recommend that the portfolio holders for Community Development and Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning continue to support the on-going partnership development programme at the Farmland Museum & Denny Abbey and suggest alternative methods of securing the future viability of the museum.

Financial Implications

18. None specific as a result of this report.
19. SCDC's annually confirmed "*Museum Grants*" budget contributes to the revenue of the museum and funds the full-time Curator and a part-time museum assistant. Without the revenue grant the museum would not be able to employ professional staff and could not function. The 2005/06 Museum grant allocation for the Farmland Museum & Denny Abbey is enabling the development programme to continue and support the feasibility study, which itself is designed to identify additional sources of revenue to enable the museum to become more self-sufficient.

Legal Implications

20. None specific as a result of this report.

Staffing Implications

21. The Museum Grants budget funds staff posts at the Farmland Museum & Denny Abbey as well as the Folk Museum. The budget is administered on behalf of the Portfolio Holder for Community Development by the Conservation Manager.

Risk Management Implications

22. Failure to achieve on-going revenue support for the museum will jeopardise its future, this has been recognised by the portfolio holders since 2002, hence the commencement of the development programme. Having achieved the initial phases

the growth area programme offers significant potential to implement the necessary further stages and move towards a greater level of autonomy.

Consultations

23. None specific. Local members have been consulted on the development programme and the Cabinet have considered the progress report in March when it confirmed the museum's grant for 2005/06. Wide consultation will be undertaken on the results of the feasibility study.

Conclusions/Summary

24. Significant progress has been made on the development of the Farmland Museum & Denny Abbey since 2002, despite the limited funds. The focus to date has been on rationalising the agricultural story that the site tells, linking the former abbey into the collection of farm buildings. As this has already started to increase visitor numbers, the next step is to start to improve facilities to both enhance the visitor experience and increase revenue income.
25. The proposed feasibility study will, therefore, be used as the basis to prioritise funding bids to implement such enhancement, exploring the emerging potential of new funding sources, including the growth area fund. This is considered to offer particular potential due to the strategic location of the museum as a possible 'countryside gateway'. The museum site would then act (very much as the National Trust's site does at Wicken Fen) as a hub to explore and connect existing, incomplete public access networks in the wider Cam valley.
26. Members support is therefore sought to further this proposal.

Recommendations

27. That the Conservation Advisory Group :
 - (a) Recommend that the portfolio holders for Community Development and Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning continue to support the on-going partnership, development programme at the Farmland Museum & Denny Abbey and invite the Curator to present the results of the feasibility study at their portfolio holders' meetings by December 2005.

and

 - (b) Recommend that the portfolio holders for Community Development and Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning support the potential of the museum to be developed as a 'countryside gateway' within the proposed Green Infrastructure Strategy.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report : "Initial brief for a feasibility study on the development of The farmland Museum and Denny Abbey, Waterbeach" – The Farmland Museum and Denny Abbey – May 2005.

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

Corrina Bower - Curator
The Farmland Museum and Denny Abbey
Ely Road, Waterbeach, Cambridge. CB5 9PQ
Telephone : (01223) 860988