

Paths for Communities

Report by Senior Waterways and Recreation Officer

Summary:	This report provides members with a summary of a new grant scheme being run by Natural England which seeks to encourage and enable local communities to work with landowners to develop and enhance local public paths in ways that deliver wider benefit; and to offer a network with more appeal to visitors and tourists, contributing to the rural economy through better support for local services such as shops, pubs, hotels, bed and breakfasts, equestrian and cycle businesses.
Recommendation:	That members note the contents of the report and consider whether there are any projects in the Broads area that could be developed with local communities in order to seek funding from the proposed grant scheme.

1 Background

- 1.1 In the Treasury Autumn statement Defra asked Natural England to develop and run a new grant scheme funded through the Rural Development Programme with the aim of encouraging and enabling local communities to work with landowners to develop and enhance local public paths in ways that deliver wider benefit; and to offer a network with more appeal to visitors and tourists, contributing to the rural economy through better support for local services such as shops, pubs, hotels, bed and breakfasts, equestrian and cycle businesses.
- 1.2 Initial thinking is that the scheme will open for applications in April 2012 and the basic principles of the scheme are detailed on the document at Appendix 1 to this report.

2 Opportunities for Broads Integrated Access Strategy Applications to the Scheme

- 2.1 Members will be mindful of the fact that funding for countryside access work is generally under pressure across all local authorities. One of the proposed principles of the Broads Integrated Access Strategy is to seek, where possible, community involvement in the delivery and ongoing management of access projects. This is also the approach being adopted by Norfolk County Council in the Norfolk Trails Project.
- 2.2 The sort of projects envisaged as being eligible for grant aid in the Paths for Communities scheme are of the scale and type that feature in the Broads

Rights of Way Improvement Plan which is being reviewed in the development of the Integrated Access Strategy. For example, voluntary path creations and waymarking of routes are two of the payments mentioned. Officers therefore consider that the scope for making applications to the scheme should be considered.

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 The grants available in the scheme appear to be applicable to many of the Broads Rights of Way Improvement Plan action plan objectives. However, applications to the scheme cannot be made unless there is a partnership between the local authority, local community and landowners. Members are therefore invited to consider whether there is scope to develop local partnerships in the Broads in order to be able to develop applications to the scheme once it is launched.

Background papers: Nil

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Date of report: 21 February 2012

Appendices: APPENDIX 1 NE briefing on Paths for Communities Scheme

Paths for Communities (P4C) Scheme

What is Paths for Communities (P4C):

Through the Treasury Autumn Statement on 29 November 2011, Defra have asked Natural England to develop and run a new grant scheme called 'Paths for Communities'. Funded through the Rural Development Programme, the aim of the Scheme will be:

- to encourage and enable local communities to work with land owners to develop and enhance local public paths in ways that deliver wider benefit; and
- to offer a network with more appeal to visitors and tourists, contributing to the rural economy through better support for local services such as shops, pubs, hotels, bed and breakfasts, equestrian and cycle businesses.

We anticipate funding to the tune of £1m in both 2012/13 and 2013/14 financial years, and the good news is that Natural England will absorb all the management costs so that all of the RDPE money will be awarded in grants.

Key Principles

- A competitive grant scheme, supporting proposals that offer best value for money, with a transparent scoring system
- We seek a project that will be light touch with the minimum of bureaucracy
- Predominantly Rural scheme
- Needs to demonstrate improved infrastructure with increased opportunity for access on foot, cycle and horse, using simple techniques / surfaces in keeping with local character
- Voluntary path creation agreed with landowners, using the most appropriate mechanism for each situation (e.g. Express Dedication at Common Law) to enable path creation to be done relatively quickly; this may include the option of paying land owner compensation where appropriate
- Simple and user friendly; the applicant must demonstrate their ability to deliver but we will not discriminate against small or low capacity groups.
- The partnership will agree future maintenance of the route(s) as part of the agreement process (by landowner, highway authority, applicant)
- Transparency of decision making, all information available on the web subject to data protection, commercial protection, and data security rules.

Discussion with Stakeholders 1st Feb 2012

- All information concerning the scheme will be available from the Natural England Website for applicants to download. Offer acceptance and claims will be posted hard copies.
- Willing to fund a range of practical solutions such as:
 - Surfacing [but as this is a predominantly rural scheme the presumption is that hard surfacing will be minimal]
 - Pedestrian and Mobility Access Gates
 - Bridle and Horse Access Gates (including those with hydraulic closing mechanisms)
 - Kissing Gates / Field Gates
 - Horse Stiles and Heavy Duty Horse Friendly Vehicle Barriers
 - Timber Sign Posts and Waymarkers
 - Leaflets
 - Development of Action Plans for more complex schemes
 - There may be scope to pay expenses of staff / consultants essential to the development of a project.
 - Land acquisition is **not eligible**.
- Projects must show a partnership between land owner / manager and local community. Every effort must be taken to include the local Highway Authority and LAF.
- Projects which support local strategies (such as rights of way improvement plans) will be given positive reflection in the assessment process.
- Must include a partner capable of handling cash flow as grant payments will be retrospective
- The resultant routes must be actively promoted and seen to add value to the local economy; needs to be evidenced in final claim
- Projects that offer best value for money will score high; grants will normally be limited to 75% of actual costs, with encouragement to seek match funding. However, the scheme may fund up to 100% of actual costs.
- The application form will contain clear guidance regarding eligibility and funding criteria. Ineligible schemes should self select out. Eligible applications will be assigned a grants officer who will work with the applicant to develop the schemes maximum potential
- Funding decisions will be taken by an independent grants panel
- Applications will be received as an ongoing process, with the Grants Panel meeting monthly to process the applications.

Key Timescales-

February 2011:	Engagement with key stakeholders in discussion of draft proposals
March 2011:	Working Group finalises scheme informed by stakeholder feedback
April 2011:	Scheme opens for applications on Monday 23 rd April
May / June:	First meeting of Grants panel

Thoughts / Comments:

The detailed content of the scheme is still being developed; to help this process, we would be keen to hear the views of partners and stakeholders particularly in terms of

- What we seek to support
- The partnerships needed to make the scheme a success
- Suggestions for practical solutions

Please send your comments to P4C@naturalengland.org.uk