

Rural Development Programme – Co-operation Projects	9th January 2018
To: The Leisure and Development Committee For Decision	

Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)	
Strategic Theme	Protecting & enhancing our environment and assets.
Outcome	Generating economic and social returns without compromising the sustainability of our natural assets.
Lead Officer	Head of Tourism and Recreation
Cost: (If applicable)	Based on a maximum of 10% contribution Capital Funding from Council £28,600 Additional annual costs estimate £1,000

The purpose of this report is to seek Members' approval to further progress a number of infrastructure projects that the Council have developed in Partnership with the Rural Development Programme Co-operation Projects. Approval will be sought for both permission to proceed to Stage 2 of the Capital Infrastructure Programme and to match fund each project up to a maximum of 10% monetary contribution.

Background

In September 2017 Council Officers' presented an information item relating to the following themes:

- Coastal and Dune protection/management.
- International Appalachian Trail development.

Context

Staff from the Tourism and Recreation Service have been working with the Rural Development Programme (RDP) team to identify and develop Co-operation projects.

A priority theme of these Co-operation projects under the Programme is to enhance the tourism offering by encouraging increased expenditure and overnight stays in the Borough. Working with the RDP Local Action Group presents an opportunity to deliver on key objectives within the Council's Destination Management Plan. All costs associated with project preparation to date have been met by RDP funds up to a maximum of £5,000 per project.

The total potential cost that can be allocated to the two areas is £286,666. The Programme can provide 75% of each project's final costs with the remaining 25% of costs being contributed by Council. (Potentially 20% cash-in-kind per project, allocated to staff time, with a potential of 5% cash contribution from Council up to a maximum of 10%).

1. Coastal & Dune Protection/Management

Project Cost £144,000.

RDP funding (75%) - £108,000.

Potential Council contribution (15% in kind) - £21,600 & (10% Capital Funding) - £14,400.

Council's approach to beach management has evolved in recent years to reflect the change in how the coastline is used and the demands placed upon it for potential project locations. The Coast and Countryside Team will build on the beach management remit and factor for the following in the chosen locations:

- A year round approach to management.
- Visitor safety.
- Recognition of the dynamic nature of our coast line.
- The need for education and environmental awareness raising Council's responsibility in the management of designated sites.

The following elements have been proposed and the design work is ongoing:

- Benone – free standing storage unit for specialised equipment to improve beach access, improved pedestrian access to the beach from the Watersports Centre along with visual screening and marram grass transplanting.
- Castlerock – 4 x 40m timber boardwalk to assist with access, along with wooden post and rope fencing, marram grass planting and groundworks.
- Runkerry – 350m timber boardwalk improving access through the deep dune system.
- Ballycastle – 100m timber boardwalk at the entrance to the beach through the dunes to include a viewing platform.
- All sites will have threshold signage at entrance to beaches.

2. International Appalachian Trail Development

Project Cost £142,666.

RDP funding (75%) - £107,000.

Potential Council contribution (15% in kind) - £21,400 & (10% Capital Funding) - £14,267.

Under the RDP project known as the International Appalachian Trail Development, a study has been carried out to identify a number of opportunities to improve the trail infrastructure and quality of the visitor experience through capital investment.

The International Appalachian Trail follows the route of the Ulster Way as it passes through the Borough.

The main emphasis from a Council and trail management perspective is to enhance the existing visitor experience. This proposal will deliver:

1. A more marketable and attractive product.
2. Improved infrastructure and trail furniture.
3. Greater awareness of walking product throughout the Borough.
4. Increased opportunity to develop links to and from the trail to our settlements and trail hubs.
5. Increased opportunity for the promotion of physical and mental wellbeing.

Council Officers have seen an opportunity to make significant improvements to the Moyle Way and the North Sperrins Way walking trails. These two trails are included within the long distance International Appalachian Trail.

Interventions for the North Sperrins Way include the following:

- Creation of new off-road walking between Cam and Drumrammer Forest.
- A new link from Bellarena Station to Binevenagh.

- New section at Bishop's Road linking with Downhill and Castlerock.
- Trail upgrade at Benbradagh to Lenamore Forest.
- Trail upgrade from Donald's Hill to Temain Road with stiles, boardwalks, way-markers and drains.

Throughout the Moyle Way it is planned to improve signage, way marking and information boards and to upgrade the trail at Glenariff Forest and Trostan.

Next Steps

With Elected Members' approval, Council officials will progress the above two projects with the Local Action Group. Council officials will lead on the procurement and delivery of these improvements to enhance the outdoor recreational experience. With the exception of an allowance of £1,000 per annum to maintain the storage structure at Benone, no additional running or maintenance costs have been allowed for within the detail of these projects. The investment offered is acting as an upgrade, and whilst day to day minor repairs are likely to be required on an ad hoc basis, it is difficult to define long term budgetary requirements for the maintaining the elements proposed.

Recommendation

The Leisure and Development Committee is asked to provide approval to allow the above two projects to be implemented by the Tourism and Recreation Coast and Countryside Team, advancing the projects to Stage 2 of the Capital Investment Process. Elected Members are also asked to approve Capital Funding up to a maximum of 10% of the total budget costs.