

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Ouse Valley Way – Management Group

Meeting/Date: Cabinet – 20 October 2016

Executive Portfolio: Councillor Robin Carter – Executive Councillor for the Environment, Street Scene and Operations

Report by: Matt Chudley – Operations Manager (Environmental Services)

Ward(s) affected: All

Executive Summary:

1. The report seeks the appointment of the Executive Councillor with responsibility for the Countryside Service to the recently established Management Group for the Ouse Valley Way.
2. The Ouse Valley Way (OVW) is a long distance footpath that was set up around 26 years ago in the Huntingdonshire by Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) working in co-operation with Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) and landowners. The OVW forms part of a 150-mile footpath that runs from its' source at Syresham in Northamptonshire, through Huntingdonshire and on to the sea at King's Lynn.
3. There is no formal documentation of when the first section was set up in Huntingdonshire (around 26 years ago) that confirms agreed roles and responsibilities for the CCC, HDC and the landowners. Consequently, on an informal basis HDC has managed the Huntingdonshire part of the route (26 miles) for improved access by regular mowing of the vegetation and maintaining landowners' hedges to give safe and comfortable access for the public to OVW.
4. These current informal arrangements are not sustainable for this Council and a review of future roles and responsibilities for the OVW has been carried out with the County Council and Parish Councils and it is contained in Section 2 of this report. This represents a good example of joint working between the County Council, the Parish Councils and this Council.
5. An annual management plan to structure the work of the partners against the redefined roles and responsibilities has been developed and is being implemented. The partners will update this management plan annually in December each year.

6. To oversee the delivery of this annual management plan a Management Group involving CCC, HDC and six Parish Council representatives has been established and it will be for this group to shape proposals for any realignment of future roles and responsibilities for the maintenance of the Ouse Valley Way within the existing governance arrangements of CCC and HDC.

Recommendation:

The Cabinet is recommended to appointment the Executive Councillor with responsibility for the Countryside Service to the recently established Management Group for the Ouse Valley Way.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The report seeks the appointment of the Executive Councillor with responsibility for the Countryside Service to the recently established Management Group for the Ouse Valley Way, that has been set up to oversee the future development, management and maintenance of the Ouse Valley Way.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Ouse Valley Way (OVW) is a long distance footpath that was set up around 26 years ago in the Huntingdonshire by Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) working in co-operation with Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) and landowners. The OVW forms part of a 150-mile footpath that runs from its' source at Syresham in Northamptonshire, through Huntingdonshire and on to the sea at King's Lynn.
- 2.2 The site is predominantly a footpath that passes along the valley of the Great Ouse, alongside the river and its backwaters. The footpath has significant amenity value because it is one of the flattest long distance walks in the UK; and many plant species are evident as well as a diversity of mammals and birds making the site important for naturalists.
- 2.3 The route passes through several towns including St Neots, St Ives and Godmanchester, and villages such as Buckden, Brampton, Holywell and Houghton.
- 2.4 There is no formal documentation of when the first section was set up in Huntingdonshire (around 26 years ago) that confirms agreed roles and responsibilities for the CCC, HDC and the landowners. Consequently, on an informal basis HDC has managed the Huntingdonshire part of the route (26 miles) for improved access by regular mowing of the vegetation and maintaining landowners' hedges to give safe and comfortable access for the public to OVW.
- 2.5 These current informal arrangements are not sustainable for this Council and a review of future roles and responsibilities for the OVW has been carried out with the County Council and Parish Councils with the starting point being CCC's statutory responsibility for all rights of way; and it represents a good example of joint working. This has confirmed the following roles and responsibilities going forward from April 2017:
 - a) **Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC)** have responsibility for strategic oversight of the Ouse Valley Way in Cambridgeshire and for liaison and joint working with the other Councils that have the strategic responsibility for the parts of the Ouse Value Way outside of Cambridgeshire.
 - b) The **Landowners** have the responsibility to maintain the land in a fit state (as determined by CCC) to allow public access along the Ouse Valley Way.
 - c) **CCC** has the responsibility to grass cut, cut back vegetation and to maintain footbridges and boardwalks. **Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) and the Parish Councils** in Huntingdonshire have no responsibility for the maintenance of grass surfaces or other vegetation. Going forward it is for these Councils to decide if they want to take on such responsibilities including their future funding.
 - d) **CCC** has responsibility for taking enforcement action if landowners fail to maintain their land in a fit state to allow access along the Ouse Valley Way.

- e) **HDC** has responsibility for the interpretation signs and on site way-marker signs that have been installed along the Ouse Valley Way.
- 2.6 An annual management plan to structure the work of the partners against the redefined roles and responsibilities has been developed and is being implemented. The partners will update this management plan annually in December each year.
- 2.7 To oversee the delivery of this annual management plan a Management Group involving CCC, HDC and six Parish Council representatives has been established and it will be for this group to shape proposals for any realignment of future roles and responsibilities for the maintenance of the Ouse Valley Way within the existing governance arrangements of CCC and HDC. It is also proposed that the Ramblers Association act as a critical friend to the Management Group. Appendix 1 of this report contains the Terms of Reference for the Management Group.

3. PROPOSAL TO SUPPORT THE MANAGEMENT GROUP

- 3.1 To ensure full support for the Management Group it is recommended that the Executive Councillor with responsibility for the HDC Countryside Service should be appointed to the Management Group.

4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

- 4.1 The Panel have received reports on the development of annual management plans for Countryside assets and the establishment of the Management Group for the OVW.

5. KEY IMPACTS/RISKS AND HOW THESE WILL BE ADDRESSED

- 5.1 The annual management plan and Management Group have been developed to reduce the risk of the County Council and landowners failing to properly manage and maintain the OVW going forward and it will help to ensure that the reducing resources of the Countryside Service as determined by the Medium Term Financial Strategy of this Council are better targeted to clear defined roles and responsibilities for the service.

6. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 6.1 The Management Group in accordance with the Terms of Reference will meet every two months to oversee the delivery of the Annual Management Plan and to receive monitoring reports on the management and maintenance of the OVW.

7. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN

- 7.1 The measures contained in this report will contribute to the Corporate Plan as follows:
 - a) Further enhancing the green environment of the District.
 - b) The Operations Service continues becoming more business-like and efficient in the way it delivers services.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The composition of the Management Group with representatives from the County Council, District Council and the Parish Councils will better enable consultation on future development, management and maintenance proposals for the OVW.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The realigning of roles and responsibilities to be fully implemented from 1 April 2017 reflect the statutory responsibilities of the County Council for public rights of way and the core responsibilities of landowners for maintaining adopted rights of way.

10. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The development of the Annual Management Plan and Management Group has been within existing resources; and they will help to ensure that the reducing resources of the Countryside Service as determined by the Medium Term Financial Strategy of this Council are better targeted to clear defined roles and responsibilities for the service.

11. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The Annual Management Plan includes actions to ensure access for all groups within the community to the OVW.

12. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 12.1 To provide full support to the Management Group for the OVW from this Council and in doing so underpin the joint working arrangements that have now been developed.

13. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

- 13.1 Appendix 1: Terms of Reference for the Ouse Valley Way Management Group

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Cabinet – 17 March 2016 – Agenda Item No. 7 – Annual Management Plan for Countryside Assets

<http://applications.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s78637/Annual%20Management%20Plans%20For%20Countryside%20Assets.pdf>

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Ouse Valley Way Management Group – Terms of Reference

Purpose: To support Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) and Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) in the development and delivery of the Annual Management Plan for the Ouse Valley Way (OVW). It will be for the Management Group to shape proposals for any realignment of future roles and responsibilities for the maintenance of the Ouse Valley Way. Parish and Town Councils will also be encouraged to monitor maintenance standards along the OVW to a set format and for identifying issues that require potential enforcement action by CCC.

Scope of Roles and Responsibilities: The Management Group will operate within the following context of roles and responsibilities:

- **Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC)** have responsibility for strategic oversight of the Ouse Valley Way in Cambridgeshire and for liaison and joint working with the other Councils that have the strategic responsibility for the parts of the Ouse Valley Way outside of Cambridgeshire.
- The **Landowners** have the responsibility to maintain the land in a fit state (as determined by CCC) to allow public access along the Ouse Valley Way.
- **CCC** has the responsibility to grass cut, cut back ground vegetation and to maintain footbridges and boardwalks. **Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) and the Parish Councils** in Huntingdonshire have no responsibility for the maintenance of grass surfaces or other vegetation. Going forward it is for these Councils to decide if they want to take on such responsibilities including their future funding.
- **CCC** has responsibility for taking enforcement action if landowners fail to maintain their land in a fit state to allow access along the Ouse Valley Way.
- **HDC** has responsibility for the interpretation signs and on site way-marker signs that have been installed along the Ouse Valley Way.

Representation: The attendees at Management Group will include the following:

- The Senior Manager at CCC responsible for public rights of way;
- The Executive Councillor with responsibility for the HDC Countryside Service;
- The Head of Service (Operations) or the Operations Manager (Environmental Services) at HDC;
- The HDC Countryside Development Officer (as the principal nature conservation adviser to the Management Group);
- Six Parish/Town Council representatives nominated on an annual basis;
- The Environment Agency and Ramblers Association will be invited by the Chairman of the Management Group to attend the meetings as required by the agenda.

Frequency of Meetings: The Management Group meetings will take place every two months and the meetings shall be scheduled to last a maximum of one and a half hours.

The Agenda for Meetings: Any member of the Management Group can submit an issue for consideration at the Management Group but notice of the issue must be given to the HDC

Countryside Development Officer five working days before the date of the meeting. There will however be the following items as standard agenda items for all meetings:

- Consideration of the monitoring report (prepared by HDC Countryside Service based on monitoring returns from Parish/Town Councils) for the last reporting period to identify emerging issues for action and to confirm that previously agreed actions have been completed.
- Reviewing progress of actions in the adopted Annual Management Plan for OVW and providing guidance on any issues preventing progress.
- Identifying development initiatives for future management plans and overseeing the development of the management plan for the next year (by 1 October each year).
- Planning and progression of projects and tasks assigned by CCC under their statutory responsibilities, subject to the Management Group formally agreeing to take on such projects and tasks.

Chairing of the Meetings: The Management Group shall annually elect a Chairman from the nominated Parish/Town Council representatives. If no consensus can be reached on the Chairman for the next year, the existing will continue in post until a consensus is reached. The agenda for meetings will be prepared by the HDC Countryside Service and will be agreed with the Chairman before circulation.

Governance Arrangements: All decision making will take place within the existing governance arrangements of CCC and HDC unless specific decision making powers are passed down to the Management Group by CCC and/or HDC in respect of the current roles and responsibilities.

Action Notes from Meetings: Short notes of meetings will be produced and circulated by HDC Countryside Service five working days after each meeting to confirm key issues agreed and actions to be progressed.

Alistair Merrick

16 May 2016