

REPORT OF THE FINANCE MANAGER

SUBJECT: PATHWAYS & INVASIVE SPECIES PROJECTS RESERVES

Purpose of Report

The purpose of the report is to obtain approval for the creation of earmarked reserves to cover the Authority's match funding Pathways & Stitch in Time projects.

Project Summaries

The Pathways Project

The Pathways project aims to enable increased and sustained use of the outdoors and in particular Pembrokeshire Coast National Park amongst disadvantaged communities in Pembrokeshire, providing a range of benefits and improved outcomes for those involved, with a particular focus on health and wellbeing.

Building on previous social inclusion work undertaken by the Authority and its partners, the project will target the project at (i) young people (particularly young females between the age of 14 to 25), (ii) older people of retirement age in Pembrokeshire and (iii) those suffering from mental health issues to achieve the following objectives:

- To provide local volunteering opportunities for those facing the most significant barriers in gaining access to the outdoors and finding opportunities to volunteer.
- To support participants in getting the best from their volunteering in terms of new skills and knowledge, social, health and wellbeing benefits.
- To support groups and organisations in building their capacity to (i) continue to offer volunteering opportunities outdoors for those most likely to benefit (ii) develop and sustain their use of the outdoors and in particular the National Park as a resource/setting to work with clients and service users.
- Identify project 'ambassadors' from a range of groups/communities of interest who can act as advocates for the outdoors, promoting opportunities and activity options to others beyond the lifetime of the project.

The Authority is proposing to contribute £34,500, £11,500 per annum from Jan 2017 for three years to fund two days a week of 'volunteer development' time for the Authority. The 2 days would (in principal) be 'bolted on' to the Project Co-ordinators role to make a full-time, 5 day week post. Three days each week allocated to the project and two day focussing on developing the volunteering and engagement work of the Authority. This might include:

- Embedding volunteering as part of service areas across the Authority as appropriate

- Developing the volunteer management skills of both staff and key volunteers
- Working with other organisations to share good practice and volunteers
- Community engagement – developing and setting up community groups that contribute to park purposes
- A National Park Ambassador Scheme.

At present much of the work described above remains an aspiration, described in the Volunteer Strategy, but without any real capacity to deliver effectively.

Stitch in Time

A preliminary application has been made to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a 5 year Stitch in Time project under their Our Heritage Scheme. The project will provide a continuation of the work carried out under the successful SDF funded Stitch in Time in the Gwaun Valley and provide an opportunity to expand this work into the Nevern catchment.

Working from source to sea the project will work in partnership with volunteers, landowners, community members and statutory bodies to implement a coordinated catchment approach to map, control and eradicate invasive non-native species Japanese knotweed, Rhododendron and Himalayan Balsam in the Gwaun Valley and upper sub-catchments of the Nevern Valley. Key areas of activity are summarised below.

- Raising awareness of, and encouraging the reporting of INNS in the National Park and the county of Pembrokeshire.
- Practical control and eradication of INNS using accepted best practice techniques including brush-cutting, hand-pulling and chemical control. Control will be carried out by a mixture of project staff, volunteers, landowners and local contractors.
- Volunteers and community groups will be supported to contribute their time to the management of INNS. Through engaging with the project volunteers will be equipped with the knowledge, skills and confidence to record and take practical action to tackle and eradicate INNS in their local area. Training will also focus on the natural history of the project area to enable people to appreciate the difference they have made. Letters of support for the project were received from local groups including The Friends of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, the Newport Paths Group, the Nevern Anglers and the Pembrokeshire River Trust. We aim to support at least 5 community groups to adopt a section of river or sub-catchment as 'River Guardians'.
- The project will look to the next generation of river guardians by engaging school children in river studies sessions and exploring opportunities for greater use of rivers as an education tool on a more regular basis. We aim to engage around 250 school children through the life of the project.
- Best practice and learning from the project will be shared throughout the project through training events on aspects of INNS management. A toolkit publication will be created by the project and launched at the end of project seminar.

The project will employ one part-time project manager (1.5 days per week) and one full time project officer. One 2 year traineeship position will also be provided by the project. Total project costs are just under £500,000 and we are requesting the allocation of £25,000 as match funding.

The application is a two stage process. The Authority has submitted a Stage 1 application for our development year. We will know if this application has been successful by the end of September 2016 and could expect to start our development year in December of this year. We would also expect to submit a second stage application in December 2017 and if successful the 5 year project would start in May 2018.

Recommendation.

The Authority approves the creation of two match funding earmarked reserves; £34,500 for the Pathway project and a further £25,000 for the Stitch in Time project. Funding will come from the General Reserve balance which at the end of the last financial year stood at £702k.

For further information on this report, please contact Mr Richard Griffiths (Chief Financial Officer)