

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**Report**

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| Committee: | Culture and Communities Select Committee |
| Date: | 8 May 2014 |
| Title: | Countryside Access Strategy – Task and Finish Group |
| Reference: | 5809 |
| Report From: | Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services |

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Providing people with easy, good quality access to Hampshire's Countryside is central to the work of the County Council's Countryside Service. With a large network of 7,000 paths, totalling over 2,500 miles, the Service must prioritise its work in order to ensure that it provides a high quality network that meets people's needs. To this end, and in light of the increasing pressure upon Council resources, it is imperative that there is a clear and agreed strategy to guide how these resources are used to best effect.
- 1.2. With so many competing, and occasionally conflicting, interests, it is essential that the strategy is informed and supported by the relevant stakeholders and people who use, or would like to use, the county's path network. It is therefore proposed to establish a Members' Task and Finish Group to work with officers to check the priorities for the draft Strategy and to advise and inform on the consultation process – ready for presenting to the Executive Member later in 2014. As a part of the Strategy, the Group should also consider the approach for the required review of the Countryside Access Plans for Hampshire published in 2008.

2. Background

- The aims of the Countryside Service's Countryside Access work are to:
 - (1) Understand and respond to the needs of our customers;
 - (2) Work with others to provide a safe, well managed countryside access network which meets current and future need;
 - (3) Encourage and support people to feel welcome and confident in using the countryside responsibly.

- Hampshire has a rights of way network of 7,213 paths.
- The network is 2,523 miles in length.
- 76.5% of the network is rated as 'easy to use' by a annual sample survey undertaken by the Ramblers.
- A Natural England survey indicates that in 2013 Hampshire residents made 70.2m visits to the 'natural environment'.
- As the highway authority, Hampshire County Council has the statutory duties and powers for the protection and maintenance of the public rights of way network.
- The annual revenue budget for this work (excluding staff) is £160,000.
- In 2008 HCC published its Countryside Access Plans which, whilst widely recognised as good practice, are now due for review.

3. Task and Finish Group

- 3.1. This important task of developing a strategy would benefit from members and officers working together to establish the scope, develop the process for consultation and to propose the priorities for action within the strategy. It is therefore recommended that a small Task and Finish Group (7 maximum) is set up by the Culture and Communities Select Committee to work with officers. The Task and Finish Group would need to be proportionately constituted and its proposed Terms of Reference are set out in Appendix 1.

4. Recommendation

- 4.1. That the Culture and Communities Select Committee set up a Task and Finish Group with the Terms of Reference set out in Appendix 1.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Corporate Strategy

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| Hampshire safer and more secure for all: | no |
| Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate): | |
| Maximising well-being: | yes |
| Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate): | |
| Enhancing our quality of place: | yes |
| Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate): | |

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

No Impact Assessment has been prepared for the setting up of this Group. However, any decisions taken following the recommendations of the Group will be undertaken subject to the usual Impact Assessments.

Culture and Communities Task and Finish Group

Terms of Reference

1. Introduction

The Culture and Communities Select (Overview and Scrutiny) Committee has established a Task and Finish Group to work with Officers on the development of a process for establishing a Strategy for Countryside Access. The Group will contribute to developing the scope and priorities of the Strategy at the outset of the process and as the Strategy is developed.

2. Membership

The Culture and Communities Task and Finish Group shall comprise up to 7 members of the Culture and Communities Select (Overview and Scrutiny) Committee appointed on a proportional basis.

3. Objectives:

- To establish the process for producing a Strategy for Countryside Access with the aim that a draft strategy can then be considered by the Executive Member for Culture, Recreation and Countryside by the end of 2014.
- To help guide the process by setting out the scope of the strategy and by proposing the aims and priorities for action underpinning the Strategy..
- To establish the most appropriate means for reviewing the existing Countryside Access Plans for Hampshire.

4. Scope

The scope of the work of the Task and Finish Group initially will be to consider the three proposed aims of a strategy for Countryside Access. The Group will need to agree the proposed priorities for action which will form part of the strategy and establish the process and timescale for its completion. This will include how the consultation should be undertaken and who (in addition to the statutory Local Access Forums) will be involved. The Group will continue to participate and advise on the process throughout and agree the final draft strategy before it is presented to the Executive Member later this year.