



## Project Initiation Document

**Client: Countryside Access and Archives Service**

**Date: 23 October 2009**

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**Project : Rights of Way and Countryside and Heritage Sites - structural Improvements**

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### 1. Introduction

1.1 This bid relates to major works required on

- the public rights of way network
- the Council's estate of Countryside and Heritage Sites
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1.2 This bid relates to ongoing Health and Safety and statutory or legal obligations including DDA (disabled access) compliance to ensure that the infrastructure of the asset facility available is in a safe condition for use by the public for walking, cycling, riding and other recreational and leisure activities associated with the facility.

**The total cost of this work for 2009/10 is £475,000.**

### 2 Public Rights of Way

#### 2.1 Background

2.1.1 The Council has a statutory responsibility and duty of care under the Highways Act 1980 to protect and maintain the public rights of way network (1336 km or 835 miles involving 8900 structures including 1,380 bridges). The network includes many paths that provide important links within villages and towns to shops and amenities and routes which are major tourist attractions. The Council has a revenue budget (which was significantly reduced during the County Council's administration – a 23.9% reduction after 2002/03 even without the compounding effect of inflation) and inherited a capital budget from the former County Council. Capital funds are necessary to undertake major works to the network which are necessary due to the compound affect of the decline of investment in the network and new demands for accessibility for all and insurance liabilities.

2.1.2 The Countryside Access Service which has responsibility for the discharge of this responsibility allocates expenditure based on the formula used by Highways, i.e. categorising expenditure based on the severity of the defect. All category 1 defects (these are defects which are likely to be dangerous to life or property) should be repaired as a matter of urgency and ideally made safe within 24 hours. This is a requirement which the Council's insurers insist on in order to safeguard the authority from major claims for damages. **Failure to resolve any category 1 defects will nullify the Council's insurance and the Council will have to meet costs resulting from any claim for injury or damage from its own budget.**

## 2.2 Reason for Expenditure

2.2.1 In the past such claims have arisen from users of the network. Particular risk and concern relates to horse riding on public bridleways where accidents have occurred with consequent injury to rider and horse resulting in settlements outside court. In the cases in question, if the injury to the rider and animal had been greater the Council could have been faced with costs of 6 or 7 figure sums. The problem on bridleways mainly relates to structures (e.g. bridges, culverts, and sleepers which are slippery and inadequate parapet/s) which under new health and safety guidance are no longer suitable. Most public bridleways at some point along a route will cross an inadequate structure and an ongoing programme is in place to erect new structures throughout the network commencing with the more popular routes (promoted routes and routes near riding and livery stables). There are 37 bridges in the present scheme including several that are closed and in urgent need of structural repair (e.g. Flitwick Bridleway 3 and Mill Lane byway at Aspley Guise, both of which are major structures, and the latter has to accommodate vehicular traffic).

2.2.2. Minor repairs to the network are undertaken under revenue provision. More major structural works which will improve the asset are detailed under this budget bid. In most cases with the more major structural repairs we try to keep the highway open, similar to the policy on roads. However, where that option does not exist, there are powers under The Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to temporarily close a highway. However, such powers only enable closure for 6 months based on the following:

- i) because of works being, or proposed to be, executed on or near the road (includes paths)
- ii) because of the likelihood of danger to the public, or of serious damage to the road, not attributable to such works; or
- iii) to enable the duty to clean the road or clear litter to be carried out

The Secretary of State has powers to extend the temporary closure but will only do so where the authority has a detailed plan for undertaking the works. **We therefore do not have the option to do nothing.** Since April 2009 the Council has had to make 8 Emergency and 7 Temporary Closure Orders already.

## 2.3 Actual Expenditure

To enable the Council to respond to category 1 situations and to avoid paths deteriorating to that level, major capital funding is required to provide the necessary improvements to the highway network. This funding has been identified in 2 areas and the sums below are sufficient to maintain the bridges (according to a survey of defects made in 2006 by Amey) and surfaces (based on reported cases and knowledge of the network, as a full survey has not been undertaken) from year to year:.

- **£275,000 Major Bridge works** – over 300 bridges were identified as major structures (bridges other than of sleeper construction) over large water courses - e.g. the River Ivel (see 5.1 for more information)
- **£100,000 Major works to surface** – e.g. repairs and improvements to tarmac paths and stabilisation works and works to paths in and around the urban fringe (the Priority 1 area identified by the Outdoor Access Improvement Plan) to afford access for the disabled (see 5.1 for more information)

## 2.4 Impact of Expenditure

Improvements to these parts of the highway network will contribute to maintaining and improving the Councils' performance against the Audit Commission National Performance Indicators 175 and 198 (detailed elsewhere in this report) and the national adopted performance indicator for rights of way (previously known as BVPI178) which measures the 'ease of use' of paths. In respect of BVPI178 Beds County Council was at once in the top quartile of performing Shire Counties. The effect if the disinvestment was to reduce the performance from 9<sup>th</sup>/34 to 18<sup>th</sup>/34 and middle quartile. Improvements would also help deliver the Government's obligation (Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 s.60) for more of the network to be accessible for persons with mobility problems.

## 3 Countryside and Heritage Sites

### 3.1 Background

The Council is responsible for managing a wide portfolio of over 60 Countryside and Heritage sites in Central Bedfordshire. These range from major tourist destinations such as Dunstable Downs, Swiss Garden and Stockgrove Country Park to small areas of land which have been established as tree and screen belts.

### 3.2 Reason for Expenditure

3.2.1 The Countryside Access Service has responsibility for managing these sites in a safe and usable condition for public access and compliant with good husbandry management. This includes undertaking improvement works to ensure that facilities available, e.g. paths, car parks, and buildings are adequate to accommodate use or expected growth and are compliant with changing legislative procedures including DDA requirements. The sites receive approximately 2 million visits a year and are an important contributor to the local economy and the quality of life in Central Bedfordshire. The Service allocates expenditure based on an individual site's landscape, conservation, recreation and tourist qualities.

- Major sites, such as Dunstable Downs, country parks and the Swiss Garden, are classed as Category 1 sites.
- Category 2 sites include smaller sites which have significant visitor numbers but mainly from within the locality and which may have specific conservation, heritage or landscape interest - e.g. Houghton Hall Park, Totternhoe Knolls and Whipsnade Heath – rather than more 'open' greenspace appeal.
- Category 3 sites are small sites which are of more localised neighbourhood importance.

3.2.2 Revenue is very restricted and tends to be concentrated on category 1 and 2 sites. Major works require the support of capital funds through the capital programme on an annual basis. In particular, capital funds are required to fund works to bridges, paths and to enhance the service 'offer' including improvements to enable access for the less mobile to meet DDA requirements, to enhance and maintain visitor facilities and infrastructure to support the wider enjoyment of the land, and to meet the Council's good husbandry requirements, e.g. the effective maintain boundary hedges and water courses.

3.2.3 Failure to undertake this work would either endanger the public, lead to major structural damage or result in neighbouring landowners pursuing legal action against the Council for failing to maintain water courses or boundary fences. The Council's Insurers have stipulated that sites must be regularly inspected and that any structure or surface whether man made or natural must not be in such a condition so as to endanger the public. **Where such a structure or surface is in such a state, appropriate remedial action is required otherwise the Council's insurance will be nullified.**

3.2.4 **The Council has other responsibilities under the Wildlife and Countryside Act and other environmental and heritage acts to ensure that Sites of Special Scientific, ancient monuments and listed building and structures are adequately managed and that their status is not endangered.**

3.2.5 The work is identified through site inspections but also through complaints from the public and regular site user surveys that form one of the Service's performance indicators.

3.2.6 With planned housing growth, it is likely that visits to the area's major tourist attractions will grow placing greater pressure on these facilities. Indeed the upsurge of domestic tourism is likely to have a similar effect. There is a need to undertake works to protect and enhance the sites to ensure that their intrinsic qualities are not lost, to maintain safe passage and to provide improved facilities in accordance with the Green Infrastructure Plan and to enable sites to widen their audience bases and more effectively meet the Council's vision and area aspirations.

### **3.3 Actual Expenditure**

A sum of **£100,000** is required to fund this essential work (see 5.2 for more information). This sum is sufficient to provide an ongoing programme of maintenance for the range of sites but one-off major projects will be subject to a major capital Scheme bid (e.g. Swiss Garden, Appendix C).

## **4. Objective**

The work would meet the following Strategic Objectives:

4.1 **Central Bedfordshire Council.** The work is directly relevant to the following strategic statements made by the new Council and would help to deliver potential outcomes that relate to wider ambitions relating, for instance, to health, social cohesion and quality of life according to the ways in which outdoor access opportunities would be taken in relation to the network.

- **Vision:** enhancing the unique character of our communities and our environment by maintaining and improving valued local amenities and, with larger sites, tourism and the rural economy
- **Themes:** raising the profile of our area; protecting and enhancing our environment, green infrastructure and spaces
- **2009-2011 Priorities:** managing growth effectively – delivery of green infrastructure, and protecting the character of our communities and high quality of the countryside,
- **Delivering the Priorities:** responsiveness to communities – feedback and comments from public surveys and user groups forums
- **General statements** – protecting our unique environment; playing a full part in shaping the sub region and improving quality of life

4.2 The Council is committed to delivery of the countywide **Green Infrastructure Plan** which is aimed at enhancing open space, countryside sites, linear access corridors, nature reserves and other green infrastructure in the county and providing new green infrastructure necessary to meet and manage the leisure and well being demands arising from housing growth and meet sustainable community objectives.

4.3 The countywide **Outdoor Access Improvement Plan** is the result of close partnership with other stakeholders in the County and is therefore closely integrated with other strategies and ambitions. Thus it has links with policies on walking and cycling, tourism, minerals and waste, planning and the creation of a new green infrastructure linked into the Green Infrastructure Plan. It was commended for its strategic vision and quality by the Audit Commission at the time of the last CPA. Its outcome themes (such as volunteering, health and well being, and supporting the local economy) are dependent on the provision of quality green infrastructure

4.4. The following **National Performance Indicators** are all relevant

- **175** - providing access to services and facilities by public transport, walking and cycling.
- **198** - improving travel to schools and in particular looking at sustainable travel options for children including walking and cycling.
- **197** - enhancing our green infrastructure and biodiversity
- **199** - children and young people's satisfaction with parks and play areas in their locality

## 5. Scope

### 5.1 Rights of Way

5.1.1 The Major Bridge and Surfacing projects are ongoing requiring capital funding on an annual basis. They cover all the rights of way in Central Bedfordshire and in particular those highways which are already at category 1 level and all other highways which are at risk of falling into that category or may require works to upgrade the highway to accommodate a higher category of user,- e.g. wheelchairs and cyclists – in line with the widening of the accessibility of routes in the Outdoor Access Improvement Plan.

5.1.2 Specific schemes planned include:

- Rebuilding Ivel Road Bridge, Sandy – completion of works commenced in previous year
- New bridges - Maulden, Shefford and Flitwick parishes
- Replacement of existing timber bridges on bridleways with new bridges for suited for equestrian traffic
- Stabilising bridge culverts to accommodate increased traffic flows
- Surfacing, widening and structure work on paths in Biggleswade, Pottton and Sandy to make paths accessible for wheelchairs, pushchairs and the less mobile
- Surface improvements on Priority 1 paths – paths linking to or in the urban fringe which provide vital links to community facilities

## **5.2 Countryside and Heritage Sites**

5.2.1 Works will cover all sites which have been identified as having major health and safety problems. The work will include

- Installation of grit bins and equipment for snow clearance at Dunstable Downs
- Path improvements at Aspley Woods including resurfacing and installation of bollards and gates
- Track improvement, removal of structures and construction of culvert at Marston Thrift
- New culvert at Henlow Common
- New boundary fence (to prevent the egress of livestock) and grit bin at Sundon Hills Country Park
- Restoration of historic parkland landscape including tree felling operations (necessary from a health and safety aspect) at Stockgrove Country Park
- Fencing, water trough and access works for Cottage Bottom Field to accommodate livestock to help draw down Access for Nature funds and to protect the County Wildlife Site.

5.2.2 The former South Bedfordshire District Council sites are of particular concern mainly through their evident lack of investment over a number of years. These sites will require major investment in the future. These include Tiddenfoot Waterside Park, Houghton Hall Park and Studham Common.

## **6. Description of Work**

### **6.1 Rights of Way**

6.1.1. Highways needing attention to be identified and programme of work to be prepared by the Countryside Access Service. Where appropriate, Highways and Amey to be involved in drawing up specifications and letting contracts.

6.1.2 Work to be programmed in to minimise disruption to users and to take account of ground conditions.

### **6.2 Countryside and Heritage Sites**

6.2.1 Site surveys to identify issues of concern and programme of work prepared by the Countryside Access Service.

6.2.2 Work to be programmed to minimise disruption to users and to take account of ground conditions.

## 7. Summary of project plan

Key tasks:

### 7.1 Rights of Way

- Identify highways in most need of attention – April to June 2009
- Prepare works programme – June to July 2009
- Tenders and contract lets – July 2009 to March 2010

### 7.2 Countryside and Heritage Sites

- Site surveys – April to June 2009
- Prepare works programme – July 2009
- Tenders and contract lets – July 2009 to March 2010

## 8. Milestones

### 8.1. Rights of Way

- Programme prepared – March 2009
- Contracts let – from April to August 2009
- Completion of works by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 and paths available to a greater number of people

### 8.2. Countryside and Heritage Sites

- Completion of site surveys – ongoing work
- Completion of works by the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010

## 9. Roles and Responsibilities

The project will be led by the Project Manager. The full project teams are:

### Rights of Way

Name	Location	Responsibility
David Leverington	Riverside Building	Executive
Chris Nicol	Riverside Building	Project Manager
Rights of Way Officers	Riverside Building	Senior Users
Caroline Romans	Riverside Building	Business Assurance
Robin Pope	Borough Hall	Expert advice and where

Highways/Amey		appropriate senior supplier
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### **Countryside and Heritage Sites**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
Clive Beckett	Riverside Building	Executive
Lyndsey Bignell	Riverside Building	Project Manager
Trevor Smith/Paul Burgess	Riverside Building	Senior Users/Suppliers
Caroline Romans	Riverside Building	Business Assurance
National Trust/Greensand Trust	External	Supplier as appropriate

## **10. Timescale**

The key dates for these projects are:

### **10.1 Rights of Way –**

Milestones Dates:

- Programme of works – July 09
- Works scheduled throughout year
- Works completed by March 2010

### **10.2 Countryside and Heritage Sites**

Milestones Dates

- Site Surveys – June 2009
- Programme of works – July 09
- Works completed by March 2010

### **10.3 Target Dates:**

- All works completed – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010

## **11. Conditions / Constraints / Risks**

The key factors that will impact the success of the projects are:

- Site surveys
- Access to site
- Ground conditions and weather



- Tender prices
- Contractors available to complete jobs within deadlines