

**BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO CABINET**

**26 MAY 2009**

**REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, COMMUNITIES**

**COASTAL ACCESS IMPROVEMENT PROJECT, CONVERGENCE PROGRAMME**

**1. Purpose of Report.**

1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek Cabinet approval to jointly sponsor an application, along with the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) and other Welsh Local Authorities (Appendix A), to the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) for approval to deliver the accelerated implementation of the Wales Coastal Path Project in the convergence area of West Wales and the Valleys.

**2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priority.**

2.1 The Wales Coastal Path project will support the following current Community Strategy objectives:

- Improve quality of life for all - to create a place where everyone can enjoy living, working and relaxing, and live life to the full;
- Look after our environment through a more sustainable pattern of development;
- Achieve a healthier county borough by tackling health inequalities and promoting healthy lifestyles.

2.2 The project will also support the objectives of the Council's Corporate Improvement Plan, A Diverse and Sustainable Economy theme. In particular the outputs will support the implementation of the priority action to "Promote tourism that attracts more visitors to the county borough, increasing the income into our local economies".

**3. Background.**

3.1 The Wales Coastal Access Improvement Programme, launched in July 2006 by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) sets out a vision to develop an all Wales Coast Path by 2012 and to deliver its commitment to increase public access to the coast of Wales as available for walkers throughout and cyclists and horseriders where practicable.

3.2 The Coastal Access programme is currently funded by the WAG and managed by CCW. Grant for the first three years of programmed coast path work, which began in 2007, is at 100% funding level. Thereafter and up until 2012/13 funding levels supplied through WAG for Coast Path project work reduce to 75%.

3.3 Bridgend County Borough Council has developed a Local Programme of project works that will be required to implement the Coast Path in the Borough. That programme and project plan will be used as a bidding document in each year of the programme to apply for funding to develop a coast path route and bring it up to the desired standard outlined in the Route Criteria and Quality Standards for the development of the Wales Coast Path document developed by CCW.

#### **4. Current situation / proposal.**

4.1 The Countryside Council for Wales is developing a Convergence Funding bid from ERDF Priority 4 Theme 3 to deliver an accelerated implementation programme for the development of the Wales Coast path by 2012. The programme will prioritise projects focused on implementing a coast path around Wales up to a desired route quality and standard.

4.2 An opportunity has arisen for the Countryside Council for Wales to bid for additional convergence funding to complement already identified WAG funding for the Coastal Access Improvement Programme and Bridgend County Borough Council has been asked to assist with this process.

4.3 In Bridgend the development of the coast path extends from the County Borough boundary with Neath Port Talbot at the River Kenfig in the West, to the County Borough boundary with the Vale of Glamorgan Council in the South East at the River Ogmore. At present project development involves working towards creating new rights of way along the coastline, as a linear route, to enable an extension of access to those parts of the coastline which currently have unregistered public access.

4.4 Officers from Bridgend County Borough Council have been working closely with many partners but especially the Countryside Council for Wales to identify potential projects which meet the aims of the Welsh Assembly Government's programme, in order to gain maximum investment, and future economic stability for the local area.

4.5 The Local Programme of project works for each Local Authority will be seen as a framework document to be revised and developed as projects progress up to 2012/13.

4.6 As such the Countryside Council for Wales is awaiting confirmation of a framework bid made to WEFO. The Framework bid, with the agreement of all joint sponsors will set out the parameters for how the overall programme will be delivered and how individual projects within the plan can be brought forward for delivery within local authorities.

4.5 Therefore at this time, whilst this authority has identified projects to be taken forward under this initiative, these projects continue to be in development.

4.6 The CCW application will request a total ERDF grant of £3.9m up until 2013. Local Authorities will then be able to bid into this pot of money to take forward eligible Individual projects to implement the Wales Coast Path.

## **5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules.**

- 5.1 The approach taken to submitting this bid to WEFO, by collaborative planning on project proposals, has no effect on the Council's policy framework and procedure rules.

## **6. Legal Implications.**

- 6.1 There will be a requirement for this Council as well as the other local authorities participating in the scheme to enter into an agreement with the CCW as to the funding arrangements from WEFO, including compliance with WEFO grant conditions. The Assistant Chief Executive Legal & Regulatory Services will need to approve the relevant legal agreements in order to ensure that the terms for the provision of this funding are appropriate for this Council to accept. Similarly, there are likely to be separate agreements between this Council and the organisations whose individual projects have been accepted under this scheme. Again, the terms of these agreements will need to be approved by the Assistant Chief Executive Legal & Regulatory Services.

## **7. Financial Implications.**

- 7.1 Whilst seeking approval to jointly sponsor this application for funding to WEFO, for this current financial year (2009/10) no confirmed financial contribution from the authority is being sought.
- 7.2 For the financial year 2010/11 and thereafter up to 2013 a match funding contribution from Bridgend County Borough Council will be required at 13.75% of cost. Any necessary financial commitments would need to be considered on a project by project basis as and when this authority makes individual project applications to CCW under the framework bid. Any match funding contributions will be met from existing budgets held for access related works.
- 7.3 In agreeing to this, Members need to take account of the current economic climate and be aware of the anticipated pressure on resources and the likely consequential impact upon service delivery across the Council.
- 7.4 The level of funding required (13.75%) can be contained within current and anticipated levels of Public rights of way budget allocation, but this will impact on the ability to undertake general Public rights of way improvement works.

## **8. Recommendation.**

It is recommended that Cabinet approve that the Council become a joint sponsor of the Countryside Council for Wales' application to WEFO for Convergence funding to support the accelerated implementation of the Coastal Path Project and to accept any grant money resulting from a successful application, subject to all legal agreements in respect of funding being approved by the Assistant Chief Executive Legal & Regulatory Services.

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**28 April 2009**

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### **Background documents**

Route Criteria and Quality Standards for the development of the Wales Coast Path

**Joint sponsorship will be with the following partners:**

Countryside Council for Wales  
Anglesey County Council  
Bridgend County Borough Council  
Denbighshire County Council  
Conwy County Council  
Carmarthenshire County Council  
Ceredigion County Council  
Neath Port Talbot Borough Council  
Swansea County Council  
Pembrokeshire National Park Authority  
Pembrokeshire County Council  
Gwynedd County Council  
Snowdonia National Park Authority