



Date: 27 April 2016

Title: Signage Marking the start of the Greensand Ridge Walk and Cycle Ride

Purpose of the Report: To consider a request from The Greensand Trust and Sustrans to provide match funding for the Greensand Ridge Access Enhancement Project.

Contact Officer: Vivien Cannon, Head of Economic Development

Corporate Objective/s	LLTC Three Year Plan – Aim 2. Objective 19	
Implications:		
Financial	√	1.2 & 3.2
Human Resources		
Operational/Service delivery		
Procedural/Legal		
Risk/Health and Safety		

1. RECOMMENDATION

Should members be minded, the proposal is to:

- i) To endorse partnership working with the Greensand Trust in order to secure grant funding from Central Bedfordshire Council (Green Infrastructure Planning Obligations Fund) for the purposes of erecting town centre signage to celebrate the official start of the Greensand Ridge Walk and Cycle Ride.
- ii) In order to support partnership working, that a maximum of £3,000 be made available from Ear Marked Reserves (503/4555) for the creation and installation of said signage.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Leighton-Linslade plays host to the start (and/or finish) of the Greensand Ridge Walk and Cycle Ride routes. Their current starting points are identified by the fingerpost sign and interpretation panel located on the canal bridge by the Tesco supermarket on Leighton Road. Their status appears insignificant and unless visitors are actively seeking the start of the walk/cycle ride route, they are more likely to be passed by without notice. Similarly, if visitors coming to the end of the walk reach this point, a celebration of finishing may fizzle out at the bland fingerpost sign. Being placed on/near the bridge, there appears to be little encouragement for visitors to enter the town centre and explore the offer of the town beyond this point.

- 2.4 As part of the Town Council's work to improve the signage in and around the town towards increasing visitor messages, etc. an aspiration to create more of the Greensand Ridge Walk/Cycle Ride route was identified. Specifically, it was hoped that the start of the routes could be relocated to the centre of the town in order to create a better awareness of the route and the tourist asset. In turn, it would serve to showcase the town centre to visitors and encourage them to extend their stay, spend money in local shops and enjoy the experience of undertaking the walk/cycle ride more.
- 2.5 Progressing this aspiration has now become a possibility as the Council has been approached by The Greensand Trust and Sustrans to be a partner in a wider project titled 'Greensand Ridge Access Enhancement Project'. Its aim is to *"improve the quality of the Greensand Ridge and Cycling Routes, Widening the range of people using them..."* Project activity includes *"improvements to signage, waymarking and information contributing to an enhanced user experience and raising the profile of the routes."*
- 2.6 The above project complements and builds on the work of the existing 'Greensand Country' Landscape Partnership for the Greensand Ridge, a long narrow wooded sandstone ridge running 35 miles south west to north east from Leighton Buzzard to Gamlingay to the south of Bedford, surrounded by clay vales. Beds Rural Communities Charity (BRCC) is the accountable body for the Landscape Partnership, a new Partnership being established in the Greensand Ridge area with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).
- 2.7 On behalf of the partnership, The Greensand Trust and Sustrans has applied for a grant from to the Central Bedfordshire's Green Infrastructure Planning Obligations Fund, administered by Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) to undertake works for a specific aspect of the area overseen by the Landscape Partnership. Officers have recently learnt that funding has been awarded subject to (a) match funding being in place, and (b) revised proposals being submitted which do not affect or influence the work in Leighton-Linslade.
- 2.8 This new grant application benefits from the greater project by drawing down £7,750 of the HLF to provide match funding. £54,850 has been applied for and confirmation of the Town Council's match funding (minimum of £1,000) will release the funding as per para. 2.7, above. A breakdown of match funding is below:

£ 7,750	Heritage lottery Fund (Secrets of the Sand /partnership)
£ 1,000	Leighton-Linslade TC (TBC)
£10,980	Ro W (Central Bedfordshire Council)
£ 1,850	In-kind contribution, project volunteers.
£19,730	= 30% of overall project total @ £74,580 (Balance £54,850)

3. INFORMATION

- 3.1 An exploratory meeting was held by officers from all parties to discuss what could be achieved in Leighton Buzzard town centre. In recent years, a tradition has

emerged across the country for people walking/cycling along key routes to have their photograph taken at the start and end of each leg, very much linked to social media and fundraising activity. The start and finishing posts are therefore becoming more elaborate than a basic sign marking the point. The proposal is to create a feature sign for the walk/cycle ride route near to the iconic market cross, in keeping with these surrounds and a condition of the funding is to liaise with key people to this end, i.e. the Town Council. The intention is that the market cross will serve as an iconic backdrop for a photograph as people stand next to the sign thus create interest in the location as well as the walk/cycle route.

3.2 The Town Council has been asked to match fund this project with £1,000. This would support the costs of the sign itself and installation. On exploration, Officers learnt that the sign would be very basic and not prove to be a feature in itself. Officers would prefer that the sign is more of a feature in order to secure curiosity, therefore interest towards raising the profile of the tourist asset. For this reason, Officers propose that Committee consider a contribution up to £3,000 to help fund the creation of a bespoke sign with involvement of the community in developing the design (targeting our cycling and walking groups). Obviously, the sign would need to be in keeping with the High Street conservation area status whilst possessing the ability to stand out. It is proposed to use funds from the Ear Marked Reserve budget (503/4555) Town Centre Management.

3.3 The suggested location for the sign is alongside existing bicycle locks near the Market Cross, see **Appendix A**

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Officers propose that a much improved bespoke sign could be invested in to raise the profile and celebrate the route to the Town's advantage therefore recommend that an additional £2,000 is offered, more that has been requested, i.e. match funding totalling £3,000 (up to) to commission a bespoke sign to attract attention.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 The ambition of the above organisations to erect a sign in the centre of Leighton Buzzard High Street will need the support of the Town Council. Fortuitously, the ambition matches that identified by officers when undertaking the signage review.

5.2 By establishing a new starting/finishing position for The Greensand Ridge Walk /Cycle Ride in the centre of the town, the town is enhancing its status as a tourist destination as well as promoting its place and relationship with the surrounding historical countryside.

5.3 By investing in the creation of a bespoke sign, the Town Council will further engender a sense of place and spectacle to draw visitors to the town centre and celebrate our Cycling Town status.

End.