

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING, ECONOMY AND REGENERATION

CONNECTING THE CULM PROJECT

Cabinet Member(s): Councillor Graeme Barnell
Responsible Officer: Mrs Jenny Clifford, Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration

Reason for Report: To inform members of progress with the Connecting the Culm Project

RECOMMENDATION: That the contents of the report be noted

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The project will support the corporate objectives of:

- Facilitating the housing growth that Mid Devon needs
- Planning and enhancing the built environment
- Protecting the natural environment

Financial Implications: The Council has committed £33,000 match funding to undertake a whole river catchment study of the River Culm, in support of strategic planning for the Culm Garden Village development. This is being funded through the Culm Garden Village capacity funding received from the Government to progress that project.

Legal Implications: There are no legal implications for the Council as the project is being managed by Devon County Council as the local partner and accountable body.

Risk Assessment: The project has its own risk assessment which forms part of the detailed project business plans. No direct risks to the Council have been identified.

Equality Impact Assessment: The project has its own equality impact assessment which forms part of the detailed project business plans.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Blackdown Hills AONB management team have successfully secured €700k EU funding, under the Interreg 2 Seas programme, towards the Connecting the Culm project. This is a partnership project which will work with landowners and communities along the River Culm to design nature based solutions and processes to improve the environmental and water quality of the River Culm, and increase resilience to flooding. Local partners include Mid Devon District Council, Devon County Council, the Environment Agency and the National Trust. The project is itself part of a wider Interreg 2 Seas 'Co-Adapt' programme, with allied projects in Somerset, the Netherlands, Belgium and France. An outline of the project is attached as **Appendix A**.

- 1.2 The project will support strategic planning for the Culm Garden Village and will provide technical evidence which will help to improve the quality and environmental impact of the proposed developments, help water management for the development in a natural and sustainable way, reduce the risk of flooding, improve water quality, and enhance the environmental benefits and leisure opportunities for the existing and new community. It is hoped that by working in a wide partnership including both British, French, Belgian and Dutch partners we will be able to learn from good practice in flood risk management across the partners that will be of benefit to the strategic plans for the Culm Garden Village.
- 1.3 The Culm Garden Village is one of three pilot areas for the project, the others being the headwaters of the Culm in the Blackdown Hills, and the Killerton Estate owned by the National Trust.
- 1.4 As part of the match funding arrangements for the overall £1 million project, Mid Devon District Council will be funding a whole-river catchment study for the River Culm by utilising Government capacity money for the Culm Garden Village project. This study will enhance the ecological and hydrological work already being undertaken in preparation for development at the Culm Garden Village.
- 1.5 The project steering group is currently undertaking a procurement exercise for the various packets of activities within the project, ready for the project starting in July this year. A Project Manager has been appointed and will be starting work at the beginning of July. Connecting the Culm will be a three year project with the end point being to develop a management plan setting out a blueprint for more sustainable management and use of the natural resources of the river. The catchment study will form part of the evidence base for the Garden Village project and its findings are expected to inform the planning of the proposal.
- 1.6 The PDG will continue to be updated as the project progresses.

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Circulation of the Report: Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration

List of Background Papers:

- Appendix A – Project Outline
- Appendix B - Connecting the Culm Poster