

DRAFT ECONOMY PDG

DATE: 16 March 2017

MID DEVON WALKING GUIDES

Cabinet Member Cllr Richard Chesterton, Cabinet Member for
Planning and Regeneration

Responsible Officer Stephen Walford, Chief Executive & Director for Growth

Reason for Report: Members requested the Economic Development Team looked into the feasibility of reformatting / republishing the village walking leaflets.

RECOMMENDATION(S): That members consider the different options presented for promoting the local area and agree a recommended way forward.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: Renewing the walking guides will support the aims of the following Economy and Community objectives within the Corporate Plan:

Economy - Aim 4 - Grow the tourism sector

- Increase the number of people visiting, staying and spending money in the District
- Improve the marketing of Mid Devon as a visitor destination

Community - Aim 3 – Promote physical activity, health and wellbeing

- Actively promote the facilities that are available in our District for health and wellbeing such as walking (footpaths, open spaces and parks) and cycle paths

Financial Implications: There will be a cost implication both in printing paper formats (leaflets and booklets) as well as creating a web-based platform for the information. This could be offset by applying for external funding. However, the exercise will create substantial work for the team, and therefore there is an opportunity cost of not being able to proceed with other projects.

Legal Implications: None

Risk Assessment: None

1.0 Introduction

At the last Economy Policy Development Group members asked the Economic Development Team to look into the feasibility of reviving the popular walking leaflets originally produced by the Council in the 1990s as part of a range of materials promoting the Mid Devon countryside.

From 1990 to 1996 the Council offered to work with Parish Councils to produce 'Country Walks and Villages' leaflets, which had a format of two routes (one easy and one more challenging), a map and a description of the walk with local artist designs and illustrations. These were produced on environmentally friendly paper, securing funding to contribute towards the printing costs. Two leaflets were produced each year with a total of 13 parishes being covered across Mid Devon over a six year period (See Appendix A). A further series of Town Trails and

Church Trails were also produced together with materials on cycling routes in Mid Devon. More recently, two booklets of twelve walks each in the Culm Valley were initiated by the then 'Devon Gateway Development Trust' and supported by MDDC and Cullompton Town Council.

Recently a number of parishes have asked if we could update their walking leaflets. However, this is not an activity that the council currently has in its work programme (or budget).

2.0 Background

One of Mid Devon's main assets is our countryside, and walking is an important leisure activity both for our residents and visitors. Mid Devon could be a significant walking destination, and there is evidence that health & leisure related tourism is an increasingly important sector. Access to the countryside is also an important consideration when people are choosing where to live, and can be a significant criterion in where businesses decide to set-up / relocate. Mid Devon has an array of footpaths, bridleways, cycle paths and long-distance walking routes which are not sufficiently promoted as a local attraction/activity.

Apart from the extensive network of footpaths and bridleways there are a number of long-distance walking routes that pass through the District, including the Great Western Canal, Exe Valley Way, Little Dart Ridge & Valley Walk, Devonshire Heartland Way and Tarka Trail, as well as being on the route of the ever popular Land's End to John O'Groats long-distance challenge. Mid Devon also has two Sustrans networks for cycling – routes 3 & 344.

Promoting the district as an attractive place to visit and live with plenty of options for outdoor activity, whether this is a full-on walking holiday or a gentle stroll on a Sunday afternoon, will be important in raising Mid Devon's profile. However, in terms of Economic Development the real gain would be to link these activities to other rural business such as accommodation providers, food and drink business, attractions and heritage in order to maximise the benefit of visitors' presence to the local economy.

3.0 Information Sources

Research shows that visitors use a range of sources to gather information about their visit and to decide what to do when they are there. Whereas the internet is important for pre-planning, particularly in deciding where to stay, there is still a core constituent of visitors who prefer brochures / guides and leaflets to decide what to do while they are in the area. This is partly due to the type of people that Mid Devon currently attracts including a higher proportion of couples over 45 and those visiting friends and family, but also because of the vagaries of broadband availability in rural areas. Others prefer to ask friends and family for recommendations or seek information from elsewhere, for example from their accommodation provider.

There is no remaining stock of the original walking leaflets and their availability is dependent on local informal copying. Unfortunately, they were first produced at a time when digital formats were not widely used and so reproducing them in their

current format is not a straightforward process. There is currently no central place or websites to go to for information about local opportunities or activities or for local organisations to advertise these activities online.

There a number of walking guides covering the Mid Devon area produced commercially by Culm Valley Publishing (www.culmvalleypublishing.co.uk), as well as websites providing local routes and downloadable files e.g. Favourite Devon Walks <http://pinns.co.uk/devon/index.html>, however, these tend to promote a much larger geographical area, and therefore dilute the particular offer of Mid Devon.

2.0 Options

If the council was minded to consider the promotion of Mid Devon's walks for tourism/leisure purposes, four options have been set out below for member's consideration.

Option A

The simplest option would be to update and reformat the original leaflets. This would likely be the cheapest option, but even this would require that all the information be checked for accuracy, and there may well be some remedial work needed to the footpaths themselves to ensure they are safe to use and ready to promote. This option would produce a series of updated walking leaflets, but would potentially mean that the greater benefit to the local economy of linking these walks to local businesses (shops, pubs, cafes, attractions etc.) was not achieved. The cost of checking the routes and then reproducing the leaflets would need to be shared with the parishes that choose to take part.

Option B

To update the information in the original leaflets, as per Option A, but to enhance it with information about local businesses such as local eateries, accommodation providers, and other opportunities in the local area – local heritage along the walks cycle routes, horse riding etc. Once the information was collected and collated this could be reproduced in a number of different formats. The format could either be digital and hosted on our or another website, with parishes and accommodation providers able to download and reprint as required, or in partnership, we could publish a limited print run. To do this exercise well could take a considerable amount of time and work so it would be necessary to limit the number of areas focused on per year. The cost of paper formats could potentially be borne by contributions from parishes or business listing sponsorship.

Option C

This option is similar to Option B, but the information would be collected into three booklets / webpages promoting the Culm Valley, Crediton and the Exe Valley as broader descriptive areas. A PDF version could be available to download. The booklets would include not only walks but links into local heritage, picnic spots, viewing points, local amenities, wildlife spots and the wider offer more generally, while allowing space for local businesses to advertise e.g. accommodation, cafes, pubs, food producers. It would have the benefit over individual leaflets of being able

to cover a number of parishes at one go. This option would be less costly than Option B but it would provide a much fuller product to promote the local area. Repackaging this information as three area based leaflets would enable us to distribute and promote the area more widely.

Option D

Option D would include updating and enhancing local information as above, but focus on producing a central website that would be used to promote the area to visitors and local residents looking for things to do. This would have the benefit of being easily updatable, and be able to provide the information in a range of digital formats e.g. downloadable as apps, or as GPS waypoints that can be used on mobile devices, while being able to accommodate the leaflet format, but in a downloadable form with the cost of printing borne by the printer. There could also be additional functions such as being able to personalise information – e.g. being able to create individual itineraries, searching for dog-friendly routes / accommodation, being able to filter for walks including local eateries (pub walks) or create personalised walking / cycling routes.

This option has the potential for the greatest benefit to the local area as it could be used to promote the wider offer of Mid Devon, and is looking to future media usage by a new generation of visitors, while accommodating current demands. It would also enable links to accommodation providers and food and drink providers with their own websites (the SW coastal path does this well <http://www.southwestcoastpath.org.uk/>). To be useful and stay current it would need to be kept up to date and managed, but the TIC has shown interest in taking on this responsibility in the future.

Although developing a good quality website could be costly, the cost could be offset through external funding. A recommendation with this option would be to apply for LEADER funding to support the development of a single promotional website.

3.0 The Way Forward?

Of the four options, Option A is the least expensive, but will have the least benefit to the local economy. Options that involve enhancing this information with a wider look at the local offer, and linking it with local businesses have the greatest opportunity for promoting economic growth. Although many people still prefer paper formats, they are costly to produce and go out of date fairly quickly. With an eye on the younger generation and to the future of information consumption we need to make whatever content is produced as part of this project as easily accessible as possible, and therefore in digital format. Option D is the most expensive option, but has the potential of the greatest benefit for providing a comprehensive platform for promoting the district, and is more likely to attract external funding.

All the options are do-able, but they will all have implications on the workload of the economy team and therefore on what other major projects the team can take on. As such, if the PDG is minded to recommend that the economy team prioritise this project, it would be useful to understand members' views on other work projects that could be de-scoped or postponed.

3.0 Conclusion

Green infrastructure has been recognised within the HOTSW Productivity Plan consultation as an important asset and a potential driver for the local economy, but is also something that attracts new businesses into the area. Mid Devon has the potential for being a destination of choice for visitors looking for the unique mix that Mid Devon can offer, as well as being a wonderful place to live. Putting effort and time into promoting the area, by providing information about local walks, leisure activities and other opportunities with links to local businesses will surely benefit the wider economy. However, there is a decision to be made about how much time and effort to expend on doing this.

Contact for more Information: John Bodley Scott, Economic Development and Regeneration Manager, 01884 234363

Background Papers: Appendix A – List of Country Walks
Sample Country Walk no.

File Reference:

Circulation of the Report: Cllr Richard Chesterton
Stephen Walford, Director of Growth

Appendix A – List of Walking / Cycling Leaflets that were historically produced by MDDC

Country Walks and Villages Leaflets

No 1	Morchard Bishop
No 2	Silverton
No 3	Sandord
No 4	Grand Western Canal
No 5	Bampton
No 6	Crediton
No 7	Uffculme
No 8	Bradinch
No 9	Chawleigh
No 10	Lapford
No 11	Newton St Cyres
No 12	Cheriton Bishop
	Oakford Village Walks

In addition the following walking leaflets were produced:

Tiverton Town Trail
Cullompton Town Trail
Bampton Town Trail

Church Trails: Crediton
Church Trails: Exe Valley

‘Twelve Walks in the Culm Valley’
‘Another Twelve Walks in the Culm Valley’

Cycling Leaflets

Cycling in Mid Devon