

EXETER CITY COUNCIL
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE -ECONOMY

1 March 2007

WALKING PROJECT UPDATE

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To update Economy Scrutiny on recent improvements to walking routes across the City and to outline our proposed focus for 2007/08 and beyond.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The purpose of the Exeter Walking Project, started in April 2001, is to increase walking as a mode of transport and as a leisure activity in Exeter. The Project is co-ordinated by Peter Grainger, an employee of Sustrans, the Sustainable Transport Charity. The City Council and Devon County Council have supported this project over several years. National Lottery funding was also provided in the first three years. The City Council also partly funds the salary of the project co-ordinator.
- 2.2 The 2004 opening of the 12-mile walking route known as the 'Green Circle' represented a significant achievement. A free 'interpretative' leaflet pack has also been published to accompany walkers on this route. Wooden benches are currently being installed along the route – in one case a £4000 grant from the Environment Agency is being used to employ artists to design and construct seats on Duckes Marsh Playing Field in the Riverside Valley Park.
- 2.3 An access audit of the route was conducted in 2005 and has informed improvements to the Green Circle route since that date. For example in 2006/07 an additional access point and path to Exeter University grounds (which by-passes steps from Belvidere Rd) has been created. The surfacing of land from Woodwater Lane to Ludwell Lane to create a shared used pathway has also been completed. In March 2005, the City Council included a series of questions on the Green Circle in its Wavelength Survey. These revealed good awareness and use. Further questions are also planned for 2007 to explore how awareness and usage have progressed since.
- 2.4 A second edition of the Green Circle Leaflet has also just been produced which will capture improvements since the route was first opened and will offer further information for users with disabilities. The City Council's approach to circulating this leaflet will be informed by results from the 2007 Wavelength Survey (for example, targeting those communities who appear to make less use of the Green Circle relative to others).
- 2.5. The Walking Project co-ordinator is also contributing to work on pedestrian signing in the city-centre, currently being undertaken by planning officers.

3 STRATEGY FOR 2007/08 – 2009/10

- 3.1. Two significant phases of work are proposed for 2007/08 and 2008/09. The scale of work involved suggests a staged approach to their implementation. This paper invites Members to offer broad support for these outline plans. Detailed proposals and any request for further capital funding will be subject to Executive agreement in due course. If agreed, these proposals will complement the work on Wild City and green tourism.

Exwick Loop

- 3.2 A 3-mile (4.8 km) route has been identified in Exwick (see attached plan which shows an outline route; the detailed alignment will be determined following consultation and negotiation). Parts of the route are already accessible to the public and other parts have work or plans in progress for access. A highlight of this route will be the long-distance view of Exeter afforded from the highest sections of the path. Way-marking, additional seating and a dedicated information leaflet could also be provided in due course.
- 3.3 The steep slopes, rural terrain and existing steps on parts of the route will not allow access for every potential user. Nevertheless, regular surface and vegetation maintenance, provision of resting places, and aids such as handrails will be offered, where practical, to improve accessibility (sensitive of course to the need to preserve the inherent qualities of the walk).
- 3.4 In summary, the route includes:
- part of the Green Circle alongside Exwick Cemetery
 - part of the shared-use path through Exwick Playing Fields by the flood relief channel
 - Exwick Acres green space to the north of Station Road
 - Establishing a path along Hamlyns Lane north of Farm Hill
 - Thorndale open space, already managed by ECC
 - a route from Kinnerton Way across to Liverpool Hill or Exwick Lane
 - a new path from Exwick Lane to St Peters Mount.

Sir Alex Walk (Footpath 20): Topsham to Countess Wear

- 3.5 Public Footpath No. 20 follows the northeast side of the River Exe for approximately 1.8 km between the bend in Glasshouse Lane in Countess Wear, and the junction of Ashford Road and Ferry Road in Topsham (see attached plan). Parts of the path are flooded at high tides and other parts are narrow, often overgrown, muddy or covered in debris. The route provides close views of the upper tidal reaches of the Exe. When combined with the Topsham ferry and the canal towpath back to Bridge Road, it would provide a circular route around the lower reaches of Riverside Valley Park.
- 3.6 Improvements, which would be undertaken in partnership with the County Council's Public Right of Way team, are likely to include a boardwalk through the tidal reed beds, appropriate surfacing of other muddy sections and some vegetation clearance. A full condition survey will be undertaken over the next few weeks and then a detailed design and plan of works will be provided.
- 3.7 It is *not* proposed to make this a shared-use route with cyclists. Careful consideration of the ecological impact of any improvements will be required and proposals will need to be agreed with Natural England, the Environment Agency (who own and manage the Lower Wear reed-bed as a nature reserve) and Devon Wildlife Trust. Consultation with

planners and local residents will also be undertaken as required. Accessibility improvements will be made where practical and environmentally acceptable, though inherent constraints on some parts of the path are likely to limit what will be possible.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. Exeter City Council has contributed £94,040 to the walking project over the period 2002/03 –2005/06. The National Lottery, Devon County Council, the Environment Agency and Sustrans have also contributed. The City Council has allocated a further £70,000 for 2006/07 and £43,200 for 2007/08. Exwick Loop and Sir Alex Walk proposals are likely to require additional funding into 2008/09 and 2009/10. Detailed design, costing and implementation planning will be undertaken over the next few months, and will be subject to Executive approval.

5 RECOMMENDED that

5.1 Members

- (i) note progress to date with the walking project
- (ii) support outline proposals for enhancing Sir Alex Walk and providing a circular route on the edge of Exwick.

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