

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES ADVISORY BOARD

8 June 2011

Report of the Chief Leisure Officer

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 MEDWAY VALLEY COUNTRYSIDE PARTNERSHIP

Summary

This report provides Members with a brief introduction to the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership and updates on progress with work undertaken in 2010/11.

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Medway Valley Countryside Partnership is one of seven not-for-profit Partnerships across Kent and the London Borough of Bexley providing a countywide Countryside Management service. The Partnership has continued to develop its service in championing environmental improvement and community engagement since its establishment in 1988 across the boroughs of Tonbridge and Malling and Maidstone. The team currently consists of four members of staff (Partnership Manager, Senior Partnership Officer and two Officers). There is shared management with the North West Kent Countryside Partnership.

1.1.2 Supporting the Partnership are over 100 volunteers undertaking practical, field and office work (450 practical volunteer days were spent in the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership area in 2010/11). Training opportunities are also provided through student placements (work experience through to graduate level). The key aims of the Partnership are to:

- Create, Sustain and Enhance local Landscape & Biodiversity
- Develop, manage and support community-based environmental initiatives
- Develop, and promote life long outdoor learning
- Encourage and enhance greater access in the outdoors and relating health benefits

1.1.3 The Borough Council has financially supported the work of Medway Valley Countryside Partnership as a Core Funding member since its establishment. The other Core Funders are: the Environment Agency; Kent County Council and

Maidstone Borough Council. All partners are currently signed up to a Memorandum of Agreement until 30 June 2011 and have committed to signing a further three year agreement from 1 July 2011.

1.2 Borough Council Support

1.2.1 This Council currently contributes £6,000 per annum towards the core funding of Medway Valley Countryside Partnership and this is supported by other core funding contributions from Maidstone Borough Council (£6,000), the Environment Agency (£21,178) and Kent County Council (£8,950). The Borough Council has also allocated £4,600 within its revenue budget to support other project work undertaken by the Partnership in the Borough.

1.2.2 The core contribution of £6,000 supports the Partnership's operation and allows it to develop, administer and deliver projects. The funding, therefore, supports salaries, IT and other essentials, such as tools and machinery. This contribution is essential to the existence of Medway Valley Countryside Partnership and allows it to attract additional external funding and deliver projects within the Borough. Previous examples of projects within the Borough benefiting from the Borough Council core funding include:

- Invasives Species Programme - Total project funding for 10/11 - £27,000 with a Borough Council contribution of £1200 (£13,500 spent within Tonbridge and Malling Borough)
- Riverside Communities Project - A programme to promote the River Medway to local communities through walks, talks and workshops; engage schools in creative design and artwork for new sculptured benches and way markers; improve access by the development of new promoted circular routes; and physical enhancements such as interpretation panels and seating. Complete May 2010.

Utilising core funding contributions Medway Valley Countryside Partnership attracted external funding of £232,000 of which 50% was spent in the TMBC area.

- Medway Valley Walk Project - A project to further develop/improve the linear walk along the River Medway from Tonbridge to Maidstone. The project involved major bank restoration at East Peckham and other improvements, such as the provision of additional gates and upgrades to surfacing.

Medway Valley Countryside Partnership developed and managed this project utilising core funding contributions. The total cost of the project was £204,000 with 50% being invested in the Borough.

1.2.3 For 2010/11 the Partnership brought in just over £264,000 across the two boroughs (the 2010/11 annual report will be sent to Members at the beginning of June).

1.2.4 In addition to the development of projects, core funding also assists Medway Valley Countryside Partnership in providing an informal advisory service to schools, landowners, the general public and the Borough Council.

1.3 2010/11 Partnership Update

1.3.1 An update of activities undertaken within the Borough by the Partnership over the past year has been provided by the Partnership Manager, Caroline Drewett, and can be found at **[Annex 1]**. Caroline will be attending the meeting to present the update and this will also provide Members with an opportunity to raise any questions.

1.4 Legal Implications

1.4.1 The Council has an approved Memorandum of Agreement with the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.5.1 All activities carried out have been implemented through existing identified budgets. The Partnership has also been successful in attracting significant additional external funding in previous years to support projects in the Borough. It can be seen from the report that the current arrangement provides excellent value for money.

1.6 Risk Assessment

1.6.1 All activities carried out by the Partnership have/will be subject to the provision of appropriate risk assessments.

1.7 Policy Considerations

1.7.1 Biodiversity & Sustainability, Community and Healthy Lifestyles.

Background papers:

contact: Darren Lanes

Nil

Robert Styles
Chief Leisure Officer