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| Title of Report: | Rural Development Programme, International Appalachian Trail/Causeway Coast Way Infrastructure Improvements |
| Committee Report Submitted To: | Leisure and Development Committee |
| Date of Meeting: | 15th October 2019 |
| For Decision or For Information | For Decision |

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| Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23) | |
| Strategic Theme | Protecting & enhancing our environment and our assets. |
| Outcome | Generating economic and social returns without compromising the sustainability of our natural assets. |
| Lead Officer | Head of Tourism and Recreation |

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| Budgetary Considerations | |
| Cost of Proposal | £176,080 Cost to Council - Between £8,800 and £17,600 |
| Included in Current Year Estimates | No |
| Capital/Revenue | Capital |
| Code | |
| Staffing Costs | Administration of capital project |

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| Screening Requirements | Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals. | | |
| Section 75 Screening | Screening Completed: | Yes/No | Date: |
| | EQIA Required and Completed: | Yes/No | Date: |
| Rural Needs Assessment (RNA) | Screening Completed | Yes/No | Date: |
| | RNA Required and Completed: | Yes/No | Date: |
| Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) | Screening Completed: | Yes/No | Date: |
| | DPIA Required and Completed: | Yes/No | Date: |

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Elected Members to proceed and complete on Stage 2 (assess procurement process to appoint a contractor) for infrastructure works at a number of locations on the walking route project as part of the International Appalachian Trail (also known as North Sperrins Way , Causeway Coast Way and Moyle Way). Elected Members are also asked to agree a contribution for match funding this project, up to a maximum of £17,600. This project will be funded by the Rural Development Programme at £140,864.

2.0 Background

At the September Leisure and Development meeting, the Director of Leisure and Development tabled a report on the prioritisation of Capital Projects. Key projects for prioritisation were listed and justification given on proceeding with a limited number, based on limited resources and availability of technical staff within the Capital Projects team.

The International Appalachian Trail project has already been given Stage 2 approval, however this project was not deemed to be a priority as there were no legal commitments made or Letters of Offer issued. Analysis by the Coast and Countryside team has identified that many of the elements that are included within the specification for the works planned are upgrading infrastructure such as stockproof fencing, stiles, pathways and bridge repairs. These works represent a burden on the Council from a maintenance point of view that would have to be addressed in the short to medium term and therefore would impact on the Council's revenue budgets over the next number of years. Officers believe that the return in investment by availing of the funding far outweighs the saving by not match funding this project.

There are a number of repair works required on Council managed public paths within the next 12 months which could be funded from the Rural Development Programme that cost in excess of £22,000. Examples of immediate remedial repairs include:

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| Doonninish Permissive Path stock proof fencing | £3,500 |
| Cushendall Cliff Path – fencing | £9,000 |
| New stiles x 10 | £7,500 |
| Croaghan Way – new foot bridge | £3,000 |

3.0 Strategic Fit

This project fits strategically with the recently approved Blueprint for development of the Causeway Coast Way walking experience and the Council's Destination Management Strategy.

4.0 Project Proposals

Project proposals include replacing signage, way marking, information boards along with repairs and upgrading of trail infrastructure at locations across the Moyle, Causeway Coast and North Sperrins Way.

Whilst the project provides significant investment in repairing old and decaying infrastructure, there are new sections being created to improve access for the public at the following locations:

- Creation of new off-road walking between Cam and Drumrammer Forest.
- A new link from Bellarena Station to Binevenagh.
- A new section at Bishop's Road linking with Downhill and Castlerock.
- Upgrade of trail at Benbradagh to Lenamore Forest.

- Upgrade of trail from Donald's Hill to Temain Road with stiles, boardwalks, way-markers and drains.
- Creation of new off road trail between Drumrammer and Springwell.

4.1 Additional Resources

Through the Rural Development Programme, Cooperation Projects, DAERA has agreed to fund, at 100%, technical staff to allow the completion of the procurement process and to provide project management services for the duration of the contract for the completion and handover.

4.2 Maintenance Implications

The new elements will bring additional maintenance responsibility but the Coast and Countryside Team have assessed that this will be negligible and the greatest requirement will be after occasional vandalism. New trails have been designed to use existing surfaces ie grass or rock. Wooden structures will be treated and have a shelf life in excess of 20 years. The cost of maintenance of the new elements is anticipated as being zero for the first five years of the project and then in conjunction with the Estates team a small budget will be required to deal with wear and tear of the wooden structures that require replacement. It is important to stress that wear and tear on wooden structures will vary depending on the terrain, exposure to the elements, usage and potential vandalism.

5.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that the Leisure and Development Committee consider providing approval for Council Officers to advance the procurement process and to complete on Stage 2 of the Capital Works process, prior to reverting to the Committee for approval to appoint the most economically advantageous tender.