

**Presentation – Blackwater Valley
Countryside Partnership**

Portfolio	Community
Ward(s) Affected:	All

Purpose

**To receive a presentation from Steve Bailey on the work of the Blackwater Valley
Countryside Partnership**

1 Background

- 1.1 The Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership (BVCP) restores and manages the Blackwater Valley's Countryside to maximise its value for outdoor recreation, landscape, wildlife and healthy living by involving and co-ordinating the work of local authorities, communities and landowners. It is estimated between 5,000 and 10,000 Surrey Heath residents benefit from the partnership annually but there are no exact figures.
- 1.2 BVCP also work with the environment agency to identify improvements to the River Blackwater to reduce the risk of flooding and improve water quality, in addition to working with Surrey CC to improve cycle pedestrian routes in Surrey Heath and the adjacent districts.
- 1.3 Following a reduction in grant award from £10k in 2016/17 to £5k in 2017/18, BVCP have stressed that the partnership is able to co-ordinate projects across political boundaries, raise funds and support partners and community organisations to carry out work, so that a great deal more can be achieved to benefit residents of the Valley than by any one partner working in isolation. If the partnership did not exist, the vast majority of work would still need to be carried out but at each individual partner's expense. BVCP argue that investing in the partnership provides best value for money through economy of scale.
- 1.4 While over £2million has been paid by SHBC in relation to Hawley Meadows SANGS, this money sits with Hampshire County Council to look after the site in perpetuity. Only the interest on this figure can be used by Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership and even then this is restricted to the Hawley Meadows site and can only be spent on items which are classed as above and beyond 'usual' works.
- 1.5 The balance on the reserve account at 31/3/17 was £105,833. As a minimum, a balance equivalent to three months of forecasted operating costs (£73k) should be held in reserves should the Partnership ever be wound up.
- 1.6 Surrey County Council has given notice that they will be withdrawing their income contribution from 2018/19, reducing anticipated contribution from local partners to £86,272.
- 1.7 BVCP have some issues regarding publicity of their work and communication with residents. Despite being relatively active on social media, the organisation has not had a functioning website for a number of months (although the charitable arm of the partnership, the Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust has a visible presence). This is

something which has been highlighted by SHBC officers, who will continue to support BVCP to address this.

1.8 The Executive awarded a Revenue Grant on the 9th January of £10,000 for the year 2018/19 subject to a service level agreement outlined below with the Council

- Work with partners planners and leisure officers to increase public greenspace in the Valley including new SANG sites.
- Manage the Hawley Meadows/Blackwater Park SANG and Swan Lake Park SANG both used by SHBC. Produce annual reports for these sites.
- Organise and lead 150 conservation projects within the Valley for local volunteers, involving 1,500 people, at least 20 projects involving 100 people in Surrey Heath.
- Work to partnership budget as agreed by BVCP members committee with at least £200,000 raised additional to core LA contributions.
- Value of volunteer activity in direct support of BVCP activities to be £150,000. Work to the value of £7,500 will be undertaken on sites within Surrey Heath Borough.
- Acknowledge the support of the Council in all its publicity.
- Maintain audited accounts to be provided as requested by the Council

2 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to consider the presentation in relation to Surrey Heath and consider any future steps which Members would wish to recommend to the Executive and/or Council.

Background Papers: Service Level Agreement Objectives (Ben Sword)

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