

**Purpose**

**To receive a presentation from Steve Bailey representing the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership.**

**Background**

1. The Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership (BVCP) restore and manage 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.
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.
3. While it is not possible to count users at every site, BVCP do monitor use with counters on the Blackwater Valley path and major sites, with two counters in Surrey Heath. In September 2020 usage figures were measured at 6,800 visits, but the monthly count during spring lockdown had reached 16,000 with annual use estimated at c. 96,000 visits.
4. BVCP stress that by being able to co-ordinate projects across political boundaries, raise funds and support partners and community organisations to carry out work, 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.
5. In their annual report BVCP advise that their £10,000 contribution this year has enabled them to deliver £39,883 of work in Surrey Heath. The annual report details a number of areas where BVCP has provided valuable support such as improving access (e.g. clearing vegetation at various locations within the borough), engaging the community through tasks such as hedge-laying and litter picking, increasing biodiversity, maintaining areas of greenspace and work on developing new sites.
6. 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.

7. The balance on the reserve account at 31/3/20 was £116,813, up slightly from £114,409 on 31/3/19. Funding comes from local authorities and income from site management and project work. As a minimum, a balance equivalent to three months of forecasted operating costs (c. £73k) must be held in reserves should the Partnership ever be wound up.
8. This is one of the ring-fenced organisations under the Council's Revenue Grants Scheme, with £10,000 awarded at the Executive meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> January subject to a service level agreement to start from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021.

Recommendation

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

Background Papers:

Author:

Service Level Agreement 20/21

Jayne Boitoult 01276 707464

e-mail: [jayne.boitoult@surreyheath.gov.uk](mailto:jayne.boitoult@surreyheath.gov.uk)

Service Head:

Louise Livingston Executive Head of Transformation