

Agenda Item No. 3(a)

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**MEETING OF CABINET MEMBER – STRATEGIC POLICY, ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT AND BUDGET**

1 December 2014

Report of the Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Environment

**APPOINT A CONSULTANT TO UNDERTAKE AN ECONOMIC
ASSESSMENT OF THE TRENT VALLEY VISION PROJECT AREA WITHIN
DERBYSHIRE**

(1) **Purpose of Report** To seek the Cabinet Member's approval to secure funding to appoint a consultant to undertake an economic assessment of the area of the proposed Trent Valley Vision in Derbyshire as part of a landscape-led regeneration strategy.

(2) **Information and Analysis** The River Trent has played a significant role in the narrative of British history for millennia as a major strategic river corridor. The Trent Valley was, and in part still is, a distinctive landscape focused on the river, rich in historical features and wildlife. Permanent grasslands for seasonal grazing would traditionally define the floodplain with people living in villages located on the elevated river terraces along the valley surrounded by traditional mixed farming.

However, in the last 50 years, these essential qualities have been eroded. The degraded nature of parts of the valley as a consequence of previous and on-going mineral extraction, urbanisation and subsequent agricultural neglect and intensification, has led to impacts that have resulted in a loss of the valley's intrinsic landscape qualities and local distinctiveness. Recent work undertaken by the County Council's Conservation and Design Section, as part of the emerging Minerals Local Plan, has highlighted the need for a more coordinated approach to planning for landscape change in the Trent Valley to arrest further erosion of its essential qualities.

The Trent Valley is facing several pressures for change and these pressures will inevitably change the character of the Trent Valley landscape and potentially impact on some of its recognised values. The need to identify further mineral sites in the next plan period and beyond, and the allocation of land for new housing growth will place further demands on the landscape in the short and long-term. At the same time, evidence points to the growing

importance of the Trent Valley as an important Green Infrastructure resource serving existing and new communities.

The opportunity therefore exists to shape this change to deliver a new and attractive landscape where people want to live, which attracts visitors to the area, provides new economic investment and development opportunities, and is rich in history and wildlife. A new, robust landscape framework would be better able to deal with the increasing demands being placed on it and take advantage of the opportunities. This landscape vision would:

- establish a new landscape character, retaining the best of the existing landscape including natural and historic features, and integrating these with extensive new water bodies and woodland as a structural framework;
- increase the capacity of the landscape to meet the demands of housing growth, deliver the Green Infrastructure that these new communities will require, and accommodate new employment opportunities for existing and new communities;
- provide a diverse range of economic development and investment opportunities ranging from formal and informal recreation, as an enhanced destination for tourism, and through the use of new inter-connected waterways as transport corridors for the mineral industry, thus reducing the pressure on the highway network; and
- deliver widespread opportunities for nature conservation through the creation of extensive wetland and woodland habitat, as well as the improved management of existing landscape that would be retained, helping to meet the challenges of climate change and flooding.

The evidence suggests that the Trent Valley is at a pivotal moment and confronted with two options:

- to continue to develop with an unplanned approach where the landscape can continue to change in an uncoordinated, piecemeal fashion which will perpetuate long term impacts and potentially lead to a degraded natural environment; a situation with all of the pressures but none of the benefits, or
- to adopt a planned approach which will be more forward looking and coordinated to establish a long term vision and strategy for the Trent Valley landscape that can deliver environmental, social and economic benefits.

The concept of a forward looking vision for the Trent Valley has already gained support from local communities through the Minerals Local Plan consultation process, and from other bodies and organisations with an interest in the Valley.

Support for a Trent Valley Vision has also been articulated by officers at South Derbyshire District Council (SDDC). SDDC has included policies within its emerging Local Plan relating to the Trent Valley Vision so that there are appropriate 'hooks' once a Vision is developed.

Furthermore, the Trent Valley Vision has gained the full support of the Local Nature Partnership (LNP) for Lowland Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire; a strategic partnership established by the Government to work alongside the Local Economic Partnerships (LEP). The LNP's vision is to help businesses, communities and individuals to create and enjoy the benefits of a better natural environment as part of a sustainable approach to development.

The LNP board agreed that the Trent Valley Vision would be one of its 'flag-ship' projects.

While the environmental and social benefits of the Trent Valley Vision are easily appreciated, it is difficult to establish and quantify the economic benefits, particularly of such a long term project.

To this end, it is intended to appoint a specialist economic consultant to appraise the existing economic value of the Trent Valley, including the value of the range of ecosystem services it currently provides. This will provide a baseline to consider the economic implications of two different scenarios:

- 1) allowing the landscape to develop in an uncoordinated manner (the 'do nothing' scenario); and
- 2) adopting a coordinated and planned long term vision for the landscape.

Given that the County Council's aims and objectives for sustainable economic growth and development align with those of the LNP, it is hoped that the County Council will fund this economic evaluation. This will provide an important evidence base for the advancement of the Trent Valley Vision.

The landscape sensitivity mapping that was undertaken by the County Council's Conservation and Design Section for the Trent Valley has highlighted the relative sensitivities of the Valley's landscape and its ability to accommodate change. It identifies the areas of landscape that are ecologically and historically rich, visually intact or a combination of the three. This provides a spatial framework as to where to target minerals extraction and development while protecting the Valley's best and most significant features.

The Conservation and Design Section is now undertaking a similar sensitivity mapping exercise for the Derbyshire parts of the Magnesian Limestone Plateau and the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Coalfield.

Unlike the Trent Valley, where the major issues, i.e. aggregates extraction and housing pressure, are understood, the drivers and issues for these landscape character areas are not so clearly established. Along with the Trent Valley, the Lowland Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire LNP is promoting these landscape character areas as one of its priority projects. These landscapes, particularly with regards to the coalfield, are degraded. However, there are pockets to large areas of landscape that are ecologically and historically excellent, as well as visually intact. In addition to this, the areas also face a number of environmental pressures, such as HS2 (High Speed Rail), the collapse of the coal mining industries and resultant land reclamation issues.

The sensitivity mapping for these areas will hopefully expose opportunities to mend the degraded landscape whilst at the same time identifying appropriate locations for growth.

(3) **Financial Considerations** The £25,000 funding for this expenditure is held within the Economy, Transport and Environment Department Earmarked Reserve.

(4) **Environmental and Health Considerations** As contained in the report.

Other Considerations

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: legal, prevention of crime and disorder, equality and diversity, human resources, property and transport considerations.

(5) **Key Decision** No.

(6) **Call-In** Is it required that call-in be waived in respect of the decisions proposed in the report? No.

(7) **Background Papers** Held on file in the Conservation and Design Section within the Economy, Transport and Environment Department. Officer contact details - Adam Lathbury, extension 39791.

(8) **OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATION** That approval be given to proceed with tendering for specialist economic consultants to undertake the economic assessment of the Trent Valley Vision and to appoint the consultant that produces the best proposal to a maximum contract value of £25,000.

Mike Ashworth
Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Environment