

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Public Rights of Way Committee

Date of meeting: 19 September 2011
Report of: Greenspaces Manager
Title: Evaluation of Nantwich Riverside Loop Project

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 This report summarises the findings of an evaluation of the Nantwich Riverside Loop project which was completed in May 2011.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Members note the report and the conclusions herein, and support the development of future, similar projects.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 No decision is required – the report is for information only. However, the support of the Committee is sought for future projects.

4.0 Wards Affected

- 4.1 All

5.0 Local Ward Members

- 5.1 All Members

6.0 Policy Implications including - Carbon Reduction - Health

- 6.1 Projects completed under the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) are aligned with the health and wellbeing objectives and priorities of the Council as stated in the Corporate Plan (2.1.1 Encouraging healthier lifestyles) and the Health and Wellbeing Service commitment to the Change4Life initiative.
- 6.2 In addition, the ROWIP, as an integrated part of the Local Transport Plan, is set within the context of indicators concerning sustainable transport, air quality and CO₂ emissions.

7.0 Financial Implications

- 7.1 None arising.

8.0 Legal Implications (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

8.1 None arising

9.0 Risk Management

9.1 None arising.

10.0 Background and Options

- 10.1 The Nantwich Riverside Loop is a three-mile circular walking route. The Loop is designed to encourage people to walk a bit further than they would normally walk, from a semi-urban park into the countryside within each reach of the town centre. Signposted in both directions, the route runs along the River Weaver, crosses fields to the Shropshire Union Canal, follows the improved towpath up to the aqueduct over the Chester Road, before returning to the town via the historic Welsh Row.
- 10.2 The Nantwich Riverside Loop is a partnership project involving Cheshire East Council and British Waterways with support from voluntary organisations including Riverside Concern, Nantwich in Bloom, Nantwich Civic Society, Shropshire Union Canal Society, Nantwich Town Council, Acton, Edleston and Henhull Parish Council. The towpath improvement works was funded by a grant secured from Waste Recycling Environmental Ltd. (WREN).
- 10.3 To guide walkers around the Loop a new leaflet has been published which is available in outlets around Nantwich and the wider area. The leaflet includes a map, directions and information on the history of the riverside, canal and other features along the route. Press coverage was achieved during the project's development and through a launch event.
- 10.4 The leaflet and route have proved very popular with local people and visitors to the area alike. The benefits arising from people walking the route include those relating to physical and mental health, connection to the local environment, confidence in walking in the countryside and added value to the visitor economy of Nantwich.
- 10.5 An evaluation survey card was inserted into the first tranche of leaflets to gather evidence as to the value of the route and the usefulness of the leaflet. 80 responses have been received so far. Of these responses:-
- 95 % said that the leaflet encouraged them to walk the route;
 - 90 % said that having walked this route they are more likely to explore other walks in the area;
 - 94 % said they preferred to find information on walks in a leaflet,
 - 29 % stated the internet as a preferred source of information;

94 % said that they feel healthier having been out for a walk;
98 % knew that walking can improve your physical and mental health;
68 % of respondents reported that they were trying to exercise more or had been recommended by their doctor or health professional to exercise more.

10.6 Respondents also commented to say:-

- “We all thoroughly enjoyed the experience. We had a picnic and made it an all day event, thank you.”
- “The leaflets ... are great. You can explore places you never knew existed”
- “The 'Loop' is a great idea”
- “More routes please!”
- "Excellent information, please use leaflets"
- “Money well spent”
- "Lovely walk - please produce more leaflets with other walks on in the area"
- "Very pleased about this walk. As a female walker who walks along I welcome these types of walks as I feel safe and also feel reassured as there are plenty of signposts so I don't get lost"
- "Enjoyed the walk - keen walkers, but nice to have an easy stroll on our doorstep!"
- "We are on holiday in the area with our dog. We enjoyed our visit to Nantwich very much and look forward to more walks in the area in future"

10.7 Conclusions

- a) Local, circular routes promoted via leaflets are popular and encourage members of the public to go walking.
- b) This physical activity results in physical and mental health benefits for those people, as well as a greater connection with their local environment.
- c) The route and leaflet are successful in attracting those who would benefit most from its offer - those trying to exercise more.
- d) These conclusions align with priorities and objectives identified in the Cheshire East Rights of Way Improvement Plan, the Health and Wellbeing Service commitment to the Change4Life initiative and the 'Ambition for All' Sustainable Community Strategy.

10.8 Recommendations

That Cheshire East Council continue to develop and promote, through leaflets in addition to the web, local, circular walks.

Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

Name: Genni Butler
Designation: Countryside Access Development Officer
Tel No: 01270 686059
Email: genni.butler@cheshireeast.gov.uk