

# THE RIVER BANK PROJECT

## Summary

The Riverbank Project, as proposed by the Friends of Castle Green and set out below, demonstrates:

- Partnership working at its best
- A fully consultative approach
- Provides employment opportunities for people with long term learning disabilities
- Enhances the historic value of Hereford's Castle Green
- Protects the Ancient Scheduled Monument from further vandalism and damage
- Diminishes anti-social behaviour on the overgrown Riverbank
- Provides for a sustainable design of the Riverbank area for future generations
- Increases volunteer opportunities within the city centre
- Engages the local community with their environment, whilst providing a safe working environment for people of different abilities and social backgrounds to mix and get to know one another
- Supports the 5 guiding principals of Herefordshire Council's Community Strategy

## Introduction

1.1 The Castle Green in Hereford was originally the bailey for Hereford Castle and as such was a place of protection for the citizens of Hereford when under attack. The site of the bailey was dependant on a number of factors that ensured it was defensible – one of these factors was that it had clear views up and downstream along the River Wye.

1.2 During the 1960's it was obvious that the riverbank (south side) of Castle Green was being severely undermined by the action of the river. To prevent further erosion of the bank, the whole area was covered with "grasscrete", a form of honeycombed concrete which would allow for the growth of shrubs and grass.

1.3 The bank was planted with indigenous species; including hazel, willow, birch & blackthorn in an effort to provide a more "picturesque" feel to the bank. It was also at this time that the magnificent beech hedge that runs along the promenade was planted.

1.4 The bank has now not had any maintenance contract on it for at least 7 years and is totally overgrown. Tourists & visitors to the city can regularly be encountered on the Castle Green promenade asking where the river is, when they are standing right next to it!

1.5 In 2003/4 Herefordshire Council hired a contractor to completely clear the bank & river wall of all excess growth. The hazel, willow & blackthorn were coppiced and the brambles & thicket were cleared. This was all done in a very short period of time, the bank looked ravaged and the project attracted considerable adverse publicity in the local media. Within 9 months, everything that had been cleared had re-grown with renewed vigour.

1.6 In July 2004, the Friends of Castle Green came into being. Within 12 months, the committee had identified "The Riverbank Project" as one of its medium term objectives.

1.7 In the autumn of 2006, the Chair & Membership Secretary of the Friends discovered 3 young men digging a huge hole in the riverbank of the Ancient Scheduled Monument under cover of the overgrown blackthorn. They had been excavating for at least 2 weeks and had dug a hole measuring 1.2 metres square and over 2 metres deep. In the conversation they had with the Chair (before they ran off) they made it quite clear that they thought they were doing nothing wrong – "its just a bit of wasteland, isn't it?" Whilst the police were called, they failed to understand the importance of the call and only responded after the young men had run off; as a consequence no one has been prosecuted for this damage.

1.8 It is clear that the overgrown nature of the bank not only detracts from the public's enjoyment of the Castle Green & River Wye, but it actively promotes anti-social behaviour. Stolen bags are regularly found on the riverbank and drug paraphernalia are left behind by addicts who use the area to "shoot up". Abandoning an area as large as this in the heart of

the city centre inevitably attracts this type of behaviour. Irreparable damage has already occurred to the monument and the human remains that exist within it. It is now imperative that action is taken to prevent further incidents.

## **The Riverbank Project**

2.1 The primary objective of the project is to restore the historic views of the River Wye from the Castle Green, whilst maintaining the natural habitats that have developed over the last 15 years.

2.2 As a community group, The Friends of Castle Green would like to take a sustainable approach to the project, ensuring a planned long term maintenance programme, as well as providing opportunities for disadvantaged groups to get involved.

2.3 It is important that the approach is a gentle one. This allows members of the public to gradually get used to the idea that the area is going to be maintained over a long period of time. Changes are made incrementally and thus we can avoid the outpouring of bad publicity that occurred when contractors were sent in to raze everything to the ground.

2.4 The Friends have already conducted a local publicity campaign about the project with feedback forms being filled in by people attending several of our events. Feedback has been extremely positive and several groups and individuals offering expertise have come forward to volunteer to help.

2.5 The Friends have developed a strong working relationship with Widemarsh Workshop and the proposal is that a small group of people with long term learning difficulties are employed to work one day a week to begin the maintenance of the bank. Once a month, the teams would work on a Saturday or Sunday in order that they can coincide with the groups of able bodied volunteers that have offered to help. In this way we hope to enhance the employment training experience for those with learning difficulties to include interaction with the volunteer workforce, people they would not necessarily come into contact with.

2.6 A detailed survey of the vegetation on the bank will be undertaken during the initial maintenance work to enable decisions to be taken about individual trees & shrubs on a case by case basis, but some general principals can be outlined here:

- a) Coppicing – in general all regenerative shrubs/trees should be coppiced on an annual basis. If re-growth is too vigorous, six monthly coppicing should be considered. Small areas of strategically placed blackthorn should be allowed to grow to allow of some natural cover, but their size must be kept in check with coppicing taking place bi-annually. This may also be the case with other shrubs that are discovered on the bank.
- b) Undergrowth clearance – there is a vast amount of bramble, ivy and general low level ground cover that will be gradually removed. Grasses and wild flowers will be encouraged in their place. It must be emphasized that this will be a gradual process, slowly encouraging open spaces in between the coppiced trees and shrubs.
- c) Hedge reduction – whilst the beech hedge running along the promenade is a magnificent one, it encourages members of the public to throw their litter over it. “Out of sight, out of mind” seems to be the approach with large numbers of cans, umbrellas & bicycles among the refuse. The hedge is also a barrier to people of lesser stature being able to see the river – primarily children and wheelchair users; they also have a right to see the historic views. We propose that the height of the hedge is gradually reduced over a number of years to a height of 90cm (approx. 2 feet). This will retain an adequate barrier to the bank, but will also encourage the feeling of space & openness with views of

the river being enjoyed by all.

d) All non-indigenous species should be removed. This is particularly the case with a few sycamore trees that have recently taken root on the bank.

e) The river wall (Corporation Wharf) should be kept clear of all willow growth by a professional team of contractors working during the summer when the river is low. This will need to be done annually to ensure the views from the riverside path are maintained. Discussions with Herefordshire Council's Parks & Countryside service have resulted in this work being contracted out to the Environment Agency.

## **Project Timetable**

### **3.1 Year 1**

- Creation of project management group
- Job description, person specification & contracts of employment developed
- Employment of project co-ordinator
- Project co-ordinator undertakes risk assessment for site
- Project co-ordinator undertakes consultation with Conservation Officer & Parks and Countryside Service to ensure best practice.
- Repairs to riverside railings if deemed necessary by risk assessment
- Identification of suitable applicants with long term learning disabilities
- Employment of project team
- Contact volunteers from Herefordshire Nature Trust, Christian Ecology Group and local people who have already volunteered
- Equipment purchase
- Press release for local publicity to attract further volunteers to project
- Preparation of wooden A-boards to explain project to passers-by whilst working
- Undergrowth clearance begins – 1 day a week (volunteers 1 day a month)
- Identification of existing shrubs, plants, trees etc. to create large scale plan of Riverbank
- Identification of existing wildlife for inclusion in plan
- On-going clearance of accumulated rubbish
- Lowering of beech hedge by 30cms
- On-going fundraising

### **3.2 Year 2**

- On-going maintenance work to Riverbank
- Reduction of beech hedge by a further 30cms
- Raising of existing tree canopies to open up identified views of River Wye
- Removal of all non-indigenous tree species
- Finalise the design of the Riverbank to ensure historic views are maintained with adequate shrub cover for existing wildlife
- Development of grass & wildflower cover in cleared areas
- Further consultation with Conservation Officer, Parks & Countryside Service and local community on finalised design
- On-going fundraising, if necessary, for implementation of finalised design

### **3.3 Year 3**

- On-going maintenance work to Riverbank
- Final reduction of beech hedge by 30cms
- Implementation of finalised design

- Project evaluation
- Negotiation with all project partners on sustainable options for long-term maintenance of riverbank

## **Costings**

### **4.1 Year 1**

3 Service Users (employees) @ £5.50 per hr  
X 6hrs per day = £99.00 per day X 50 £4,950

Oncosts (N.I. contributions) £1,848

Staff 1.5 days per week £4,537

Oncosts (N.I. contributions & superann.) £1,270

Transport £2,200

Trailer (removal of cleared vegetation & rubbish etc) £ 350

Miscellaneous (hand tools, gloves, etc) £2,500

Extended Insurance for volunteer workers (FOCG) £ 105

**TOTAL £17,760**

10% Administration costs for Friends of Castle Green £1,776

**TOTAL 1ST YEAR COSTS £19,536**

### **4.2 Year 2**

£19,420 - £2,500 (capital costs for tools) £17,036

10% inflationary increase £1,703

**TOTAL 2ND YEAR COSTS £18,739**

### **4.3 Year 3**

10% inflationary increase on Year 2 costs £1,873

**TOTAL 3RD YEAR COSTS £20,612**

## **Funding**

5.1 Herefordshire Council's Parks & Countryside Service has already allocated £7,000 for this project.

5.2 Immediate application Hereford City Council for match funding of this figure.

5.3 Immediate application to English Heritage for the remaining shortfall.

5.4 An application to Central Networks "Safer Environment Fund" for repairs to the riverside railings.

## **Outcomes for people with learning disabilities**

6.1 Recent public consultation (“Are You Being Served” days at Widemarsh Workshop November 06) with people with learning disabilities evidences the fact that lots of people are interested in gaining employment who are currently reliant on social care for daytime support.

6.2 People were motivated by the fact they could be paid instead of volunteering.

6.3 People identified gardening and horticulture as an area of employment they would like to move into.

6.4 People wanted to feel good about themselves, having a job would increase their self esteem and change how others perceived them.

6.5 To have an income would in turn create a better quality of life and they would become consumers.

6.6 To work alongside others and to have greater access to community participation via an increased income will enable greater inclusion and networking onto ordinary lifestyles and greater participation.

6.7 A report produced in April 06 completed by an independent consultancy I’SE (Institute for Social Entrepreneurs) recommended we seek supported ways to enable people with disabilities to gain employment via social enterprise and social business.

6.8 The project supports Herefordshire’s the community strategies 5 guiding Principles:

- Realise the potential of Herefordshire, It’s people and communities
- Integrate sustainability into all our actions
- Ensure an equal and inclusive society
- Build on the achievements of partnership and ensure continual improvement
- Protect and improve Herefordshire’s distinctive environment

## **Outcomes for the Friends of Castle Green**

7.1 Increased visibility of the work undertaken by the group.

7.2 This would be the second project to have a dramatic effect on the look of Castle Green (work to Hogg’s Mount steps to go on site Autumn 2007).

7.3 This project demonstrates effective partnership working.

7.4 Restoration of historic views of the River Wye from Hereford’s Castle Green, whilst retaining the “picturesque” feel of the riverbank and the maintenance of habitats for existing wildlife.

7.5 Increased opportunities for voluntary work on the Castle Green, developing a collective sense of ownership and respect for the park.