

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

FRIDAY 22 MARCH 2002 AT 2.00 P.M.

Agenda Item No.

8

BEST VALUE REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Report of the Director of Environment

Author : Peter Davidson Tel: 01992 555230

Executive Member : Iris Tarry

1. Purpose of report

To present the recommendations and improvement plan arising from the Best Value Review.

2. Summary

The Best Value Review of Environmental Management Services began in June 2001 and has concluded with a set of recommendations supported by an Improvement Plan. The suggested approach has been agreed by the Member Review Group, which included Gerald Game (Chairman), Janet Anderson, Mary Bayes, Geoff Churchard and Brian York. Overall the recommendations seek to gain better value from existing resources by focussing activity on key priorities which will improve public access to the countryside, improve the sustainable management of environmental resources through advice and information and better manage the council's assets.

3. Conclusion

Many of the proposals could be resourced from present budgets, others by re-prioritisation of existing investment and associated work programmes together with contributions from partners. The Review Group were also appraised of possible improvements to Aldenham Country Park which would need to be looked at alongside other priorities when the 2003/4 capital programme is considered. A summary of the financial implications is provided in Section 7 with more information given in Appendix 1.

Cabinet is invited to consider the recommendations of the review.

4. Background

- 4.1 The County Council invests approximately £985,000 and employs 38 officers within the services under review. The majority (78 %) of the investment is allocated to staff costs. A further 10% is invested in external partners (e.g. Groundwork

Hertfordshire). It is also worth noting that 62% of the budget under review is invested in jointly-funded services, indicating a high level of partnership with, in particular, District Councils.

4.2 The services within the scope of the Best Value Review include:

- **Services wholly funded by the County Council** – Aldenham Country Park, Archaeology, Landscape, Recreation Sites and Woodland Management;
- **Jointly funded services** – hosted by the County Council with funding from District Council partners: Countryside Management Service (CMS), Herts Biological Records Centre (HBRC) and Watling Chase Community Forest (WCCF);
- **External partners** – services funded by the County Council but delivered through the independent sector: Built Environment Advisory Management Service (BEAMS), Groundwork Hertfordshire, Herts Gardens Trust and Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT).

In organisational terms, these services are located in the Environmental Management Group within the Environment Department. The services are managed through the Environment Strategy and Action (ES&A) client unit.

4.3 The Review has revealed that:

- Many of the services are partnership-based with HCC funding having a multiplier effect;
- The environmental advice services provide a key supporting role for both County and District policy and development control activities;
- Most of the specialist services have been commended by their users with, in particular, the HBRC being recognised as being at the forefront, nationally;
- Services such as Aldenham Country Park are well used and appreciated by the public with an estimated 300,000 visitors per year, which makes it the second most visited attraction in the County after St.Albans Abbey (East of England Tourist Board, 1999);
- Hertfordshire has a reputation for being able to deliver a range of services in partnership with others and these include CMS, HBRC and WCCF as well as having strong links with the independent sector;
- The CMS is well supported by both the County and District Councils as well as the London Borough of Barnet and remains as probably the only countywide countryside management service in the country;
- From the surveys it is evident that most of the services are meeting users needs but that there is room for improvement;
- The services under review are discretionary i.e. there is no duty to provide them. As a result it is difficult to compare their performance with others or to identify standards as each authority has developed in accordance with local priorities that are generally not the same;
- There is a lack of specification for some of the jointly funded services.

5. The Best Value Review Process

5.1 The process for the Environmental Management BVR included:

- **Challenge.** A detailed examination of the services under review resulted in the production of a Position Statement, which identified key issues for detailed consideration. The issues were discussed and refined with a Reference Group involving approximately 35 people representing a range of internal and external interests and meeting on 4 occasions in workshop sessions. The BVR also involved 4 external challengers. In addition a workshop involving staff was held to discuss the issues emerging from the Position Statement.
- **Consult.** An extensive programme of consultation was undertaken involving 13 different surveys – questionnaire and on-site surveys – resulting in over 900 responses. The responses have been used throughout the process and have underpinned the development of the recommendations.
- **Compare.** As the services are discretionary it has been very difficult to compare performance with other authorities. County Councils within the East and South-East of England were visited and included Essex, Hampshire, Suffolk and Surrey. The main areas of divergence in service investment by the Authority compared to the other County Councils was in the relatively low level of investment in country parks and recreation sites and the existence of a countywide CMS within Hertfordshire.
- **Compete.** The services under review are delivered through three different service models. The improvement plan includes options that seek different partnerships with both the public and private sectors.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 These major recommendations are elaborated in the Improvement Plan (Appendix 1), which also includes other proposals for changes to services and a glossary.
- 6.2 **Countryside Access** – The County Council invests almost £250,000 (01/02) in this service. The Review revealed a number of issues with regard to an apparent lack of integration and co-ordination of the services. The recommendations aim to tackle this issue, ensure greater involvement by communities and make information more accessible.

The Review recommends that the County Council should seek to improve Countryside Access by:

1. Actively promoting an approach, from April 2002 that builds upon the Parish Paths Partnership (P3) to encourage and enable community involvement in the improvement and promotion of access on the public rights of way network and that the County Council continues to fund P3 at the current level.
2. Dedicating a number of routes across its' own recreation sites as public rights of way in order to secure long-term public access and management by April 2004.

3. Engaging with partners to produce an Access Strategy for Hertfordshire in order to co-ordinate and guide investment in outdoor recreation in the county by September 2003.
4. Undertaking with partners a project to compile information on all informal outdoor recreational opportunities (both public and private sector) in Hertfordshire and to make this information publicly available by April 2004.

6.3 **Asset Management.** The County Council invests £95,000 (01/02) in this service with Aldenham Country Park's operating account being managed on a zero cost basis. The Country Park is the only service that is managed in this way within the Review. Evidence collected from other County Councils indicates that similar country parks are managed with financial support, which ranged from £ 170,000 in Suffolk to £2,000,000 in Essex. (These figures include recreation sites).

A number of issues arose from the BVR.

- 6.3.1 **Aldenham Country Park.** From the user surveys that have been undertaken, it is clear that the Country Park is a well used and valued facility with an estimated 300,000 visitors in a normal year. The aim of the management of the Park is to break even. Unfortunately, because of poor weather and its recent temporary closure due to Foot and Mouth, Aldenham Country Park is not meeting its income target and is likely to produce a deficit of in excess of £50,000 in 2001/02.
- 6.3.2 Prior to this Review, there have been a number of occasions when the Park's disposal has been considered, but progress has been held back because of a major liability: the County Council is responsible for the full repair and maintenance of a dam that dates from Napoleonic times. The lease has 14 years to run and the rent is currently being reviewed. The Best Value Review process has proposed the consideration of a public/private partnership and/or seeking financial support from adjoining local authorities whose residents are users of the Park and this will be considered as part of the Improvement Plan. However, it is recognised that there needs to be a balance between the informal nature of the country park and the likely expectations of commercial enterprise.
- 6.3.3 The Best Value Review when considering the issue of the future of the Park was appraised of the existence of the Park Development Plan. This Plan has been produced by the Park's Advisory Board to address the future of the facility over the next five years. The Plan seeks to safeguard the asset through maintenance as well as recognising the need to ensure the safety of the Park's many visitors. It also includes a number of improvements to the Park's facilities in order to encourage greater use particularly during off-peak times when visitor numbers are often dependent on the weather. Within the Plan £350,000 of investment has been identified of which about £150,000 is needed to undertake structural maintenance, excluding work on the dam for which capital has been previously identified.

6.3.4 The Review Group received the Development Plan recognising that it is a useful document that provides a context for the future consideration of both essential and desirable improvements that are in line with user-surveys. The Improvement Plan suggests that further work should be undertaken to test the proposals and to identify a set of achievable and prioritised improvements for the next 5 years. In particular there is a need to identify options that will increase income and thereby enable the Park to become more self-sufficient. If it is not possible fully to fund this investment from other sources a bid will be made for County Council capital funding as part of the future capital programme from 2003/04, to allow comparison with other priorities.

The Review recommends that the County Council should:

5. Develop Aldenham Country Park over the next 5 years as an attractive recreation site, with the aim of becoming more self-sufficient and which offers a range of high quality facilities for users.

6.3.5 **Recreation Sites.** The County Council maintains 10 recreation sites spread unevenly across the County. The sites include 2 parts of former railway lines, Broxbourne and Bencroft Woods, a linear route plus a number of other sites that provide local informal recreation. The Best Value Review has found that some sites appear to be well used with Paradise Piggeries almost unused. In response, the County Council recently has sought to maintain many of its sites to minimum standards to ensure public safety, but without major investment for maintenance.

6.3.6 The Reference Group questioned the role of the County Council as a strategic authority in providing small scale sites especially as this Authority provides significantly less investment in this area compared to the other authorities visited during the Review.

6.3.7 As a consequence, the Improvement Plan recognises the need to reduce the Authority's liability where there is no clear service reason for retaining the sites (and/or where an alternative use can improve/increase services). The Review has made a number of proposals to improve performance.

6.3.8 The main proposal relates to Paradise Piggeries which, it is suggested should be decommissioned. The process would involve the removal and disposal of all play equipment and picnic tables and the closure of the car park through the introduction of barriers. Members of the public will still be able to access the site on foot. The costs of this procedure will be met from existing budgets. The cost of £5,000 for decommissioning needs to be set against future liabilities, if the site remains open, including necessary maintenance of the play equipment and the car park which would be expected to be up to £15,000. Current investment is negligible and involves litter picking and removal of dumped material.

6.3.9 Treasure's Grove will be closed because the landowner wishes to cease the County Council's lease on the site. The remaining sites will be subject to a range of different management approaches within existing resources.

The Review recommends that in order to reduce its liability the County Council should:

6. Consider the disposal or decommissioning of non-strategic recreation sites (Treasures Grove and Paradise Piggeries); investigate the feasibility of transferring the management responsibilities of St. Margaret's Wood and Wilbury Hill to other public bodies; retain Symondshyde; and introduce alternative management regimes for the remaining recreation sites (Cole Green Way, Ayot Greenway, Riverside Way and Broxbourne/Bencroft Woods).

6.4 **Information & Communication Technology (ICT).** This response grew out of an identified need from users for easier and quicker access to environmental information and advice for which the County Council currently invests £375,000. The solution being suggested seeks to use ICT to provide on-line access as well as providing an opportunity to promote other partners particularly in the independent sector. Exploratory discussions have been held with a local district council with regard to enhancing the delivery of EMG's services through ICT and further work is planned through the Improvement Plan.

The Review recommends that in order to promote access to environmental information and advice:

7. The Environmental Management Group (EMG) should implement, by March 2004, a strategy for making a specified range of its environmental information publicly available via the Environment Channel on HertsDirect.
8. The County Council should, by March 2003, provide public access via HertsDirect to the environmental information and advice offered by other partners e.g. Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT), Hertfordshire Gardens Trust (HGT) and Groundwork.
9. The potential for enhancing the delivery of Environmental Management Group's (EMG) environmental advice services through ICT should be explored through a pilot project with a specific district council by March 2003. This should lead the way to ICT being the primary method of communication with public sector partners by March 2005.

6.5 **Land Management.** Over £150,000 (01/02) is invested by the Authority in agri-environment work in the form of advice to farmers and landowners and pump-priming practical schemes. During 2000/01, the Countryside Management Service was involved in almost half of the 31 Countryside Stewardship applications in the county. These applications have a value of over £250,000 over the next 10 years. Nationally and regionally there is an acceptance that radically new approaches to agriculture are required to sustain the rural economy, meet concerns of both the consumer and taxpayers and safeguard landscape and biodiversity. The proposed Land Management Plan reflects the number of interests that need to be co-ordinated.

The review recommends that in order to secure best value from its investment in agri-environment work that the County Council should:

10. In partnership with the Hertfordshire Rural Forum, lead on the development of a Land Management Plan for Hertfordshire, to be completed by September 2003.
11. Review its investment in those services which promote and advise on agri-environment matters once the Land Management Plan has been produced.

6.6. **Service Development.** These proposals are designed to provide straight forward improvements and relate to many of the issues that were identified by the user surveys and the Reference Group workshops. For example, consultees wanted clearer links with policies and greater influence brought to bear on funding streams.

The Review recommends the following actions in order to improve future service delivery:

12. From April 2002 the Landscape Service should be delivered in accordance with a specification agreed by EMG with the service's key clients / stakeholders, ensuring effective support for the development control process and the provision of strategic policy advice.
13. EMG should, by September 2002, produce a new specification (in partnership with users and Local Authorities) for its built environment advisory service. This process will also address the long-term arrangements for procuring the service and the need for urban design advice in Hertfordshire.
14. EMG should, in partnership with the Environment Department's Forward Planning Unit, seek to ensure that the proposed changes to the Structure Plan Annual Monitoring Report addresses the need to monitor the effectiveness of environmental and landscape conservation policies.
15. EMG should develop and implement, from April 2002, a systematic programme and procedures for influencing key local, regional and national policy documents.
16. In 2002-2003, EMG should assess whether it has taken full advantage of the opportunities for securing environmental enhancements through the planning process. In response to this assessment, service improvements will be made.
17. EMG should undertake regular surveys of stakeholders and users of its facilities and services.

6.7 **Contribution to Best Value Performance Promises.** Of the current promises (2001/02) the recommendations contribute to the following:

- Fight the loss of green fields by encouraging high quality building on previously developed land – recommendations 12 and 13.

- Work with business to increase prosperity, protect jobs and improve standards of living for local people – recommendations 10 and 11.
- To give local communities a better voice - recommendations 1 and 17.
- Provide quality advice and information services – recommendations 4,7,8 and 9.

The recommendations relate to the 2002/03 BVPP Promises in the following way:

- We will work with the community to protect and enhance our environment – recommendations 5, 6,10,11,12 and 13.
- We will fight the loss of Greenfields and avoid, wherever possible, development on green areas in our towns by encouraging buildings of high quality on previously developed land – recommendations 14,15 and 16
- We will work with the NHS, voluntary organisations and other councils to improve health and care services – recommendation 3.
- We will cut the number of people killed and seriously injured on our roads – recommendation 2
- We will give local communities a better voice to tackle local problems – recommendation 1 and 17.
- We will make it easier for people to get the advice and information they need from us – recommendations 4,7,8 and 9.

7.0 **Financial Implications**

- 7.1 If all the recommendations contained in this report are agreed, they will result in revenue spending of £65,000 spread over two years and a further £10,000 per year in on-going expenditure. These costs can be met by redirecting part of the existing projects budget which currently stands at £145,000 per year. The projects budget provides for project development across the Group and with its partners, purchasing equipment and as a contingency for unplanned expenditure. Current examples of such expenditure includes the resourcing of the Best Value Review, support for Aldenham Country Park following the impact of Foot and Mouth, the recruitment of key staff, facilitating the CMS move to new premises, dealing with the removal of asbestos and EMS (ISO 14001) accreditation.
- 7.2 In addition, the need for possible capital expenditure of up to £350,000 over five years has been identified. Once the various projects that this covers have been prioritised, alternative sources of finance would be explored and any shortfall would be the subject of a bid for capital funding as part of the normal budget process.
- 7.3 Whilst none of the proposals is likely to result in immediate cash savings, improvements to services equivalent to approximately £55,000 are anticipated at no extra costs (non-cashable efficiencies).
- 7.4 Details of the financial implications of each recommendation are shown in Appendix 1 and summarised in three main groupings in the table below.

Recommendations to be resourced from within existing staffing budget.

(The costs of any staff input will be absorbed within existing budgets. These recommendations will result in extra and/or improved services being provided to the public at no extra cost.)

Recommendation	Nature/Value of Service Improvement
	£
1. Actively Promote Parish Paths Partnership	Up to £44,000 of existing maintenance budget determined locally
2. Dedicate Rights of Way (RoW) across recreation sites.	To be linked to the Access Strategy
8. Provide public access via HertsDirect to information held by partner organisation.	Better access to wider range of environmental information
9. Enhance delivery of EMG advice through ICT	Up to £6,000 of benefit as result of reduced time
11. Review Investment in services that promote agri-environment	Greater focus on relevant priorities and funding streams
12. Deliver Landscape Service in accordance with a revised specification.	Greater consistency of advice and development control
13. Produce a new specification for the built environment advisory service.	Clearer achievement of HCC policies
14. Monitor the effectiveness of environmental and landscape conservation policies.	More informed policy development
15. Implement a programme for influencing key local, regional and national policy documents.	Greater influence within emerging areas and associated funding opportunities
16. Ensure full advantage is taken of opportunities to secure environmental enhancements through the planning process.	Making the most of S.106 opportunities to enhance the environment.

Recommendations that can be resourced by re-directing existing projects budget

(Officer time required can be met from within existing resources).

Recommendation	Financial Implications #	Nature/Value of Service Improvement
	£	£
3. Produce An Access Strategy	+10,000	Could link to RoW Improvement Plans and provide a platform for bids.
4. Compile information on outdoor recreational opportunities.	+15,000	Will help publicise opportunities for outdoor recreation
5. Develop Aldenham Country Park	+10,000	Ensure that future improvements are prioritised; explore public/private partnerships; seek new funding opportunities
6. Dispose of or decommission Treasures Grove and Paradise Piggeries recreation sites.	+5,000*	Reduce liabilities to provide potential non-cashable saving
7. Make information available via HertsDirect.	+15,000	Make information more accessible to reduce time spent on requests – estimated as offering £5,000 of non-cashable saving
10. Develop a Land Management Plan for Hertfordshire in partnership with Hertfordshire Rural Forum.	+10,000	Strategy could become bidding document enabling targeted investment and income generation
17. Undertake regular surveys of stakeholders.	+10,000	In line with County Council's policy of positive consultation
Sub-total	+75,000	
To be financed by a reduction in existing projects budget	-75,000	
Net effect on Revenue Budget	Nil	

Notes:

With the exception of recommendation 17, all other items are one-off and would be financed over two years.

* If these sites are not disposed of or de-commissioned, expenditure of up to £15,000 will be required to provide safe play equipment.

Recommendation Requiring Capital Bids

Recommendation	Financial Implications*	Nature/Value of Service Improvement
5. Develop Aldenham Country Park	Up to £350,000	Details of service improvements will be identified if and when a bid for County Council capital funding is made. Examples identified in Appendix 1 would indicate that an investment of £90,000 could provide a return of an increase in income of over £12,500 p.a. \equiv 14% return on capital invested.
<p>Note* Possible alternative sources of funding to be sought including private sector partners and other local authorities will be considered as part of the Improvement Plan.</p> <p>Any capital investment to be requested from Hertfordshire County Council would need to be the subject of a capital bid and evaluated against other priorities.</p>		

Supporting information for the Review includes:

The Terms of Reference - July 2001;

The Position Statement – August 2001;

The report to the Recommendations Workshop (includes Hypotheses used in the Review) - November 2001.

Appendix 1

Environmental Management Best Value Review

Details of Financial Implications

March 2002

Service	Environmental Management Services
Net Expenditure	£985,000

Recommendation	Total Investment Required	Payback Timescale Years	Annual Other Cost £	Annual Cashable Saving £	Annual Non cashable Saving £
Countryside Access - HCC Investment £250,000 p.a.					
The Review recommends that the County Council should seek to improve Countryside Access by:					
Recommendation 1 – Actively promoting an approach, from April 2002, that builds upon the Parish Paths Partnership (P3) to encourage and enable community involvement in the improvement and promotion of access on the public rights of way network and that the County Council continues to fund P3 at the current level.	No additional resources. The proposal is seeking to re-specify the service in line with current policy.	From 2002 onwards	0	0	By 2005 10% of the RoW maintenance budget would be locally directed to meet local priorities – equiv. £44,000 at 01/02 costs

<p>Recommendation 2 - Dedicating a number of routes across its' own recreation sites as public rights of way in order to secure long-term public access and management by April 2004.</p>	<p>No additional resources. Total cost of dedicating a number of linear recreation sites as Rights of Way will involve existing resources. The work will be carried out within current RoW priorities. The current estimate for this work would be around £3000.</p>	<p>Process to be completed by April 2004</p>	<p>Could be longer term maintenance issues that would need to be addressed by the Highway Authority. These would be met by transferring £1000 p.a. per route from current budgets.</p>	<p>0</p>	<p>0</p>
<p>Recommendation 3 – Engaging with partners to produce an Access Strategy for Hertfordshire in order to co-ordinate and guide investment in outdoor recreation in the county by September 2003.</p>	<p>Current Projects Budget £10k plus SSA Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 allocations</p>	<p>Work will be linked to the development and production of the Rights of Way Improvement Plans that will be reviewed every 10 years as part of the County Council's duty under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.</p>	<p>£1000</p>	<p>0</p>	<p>Strategy could be a bidding document enabling targeted investment and income generation.</p>

Recommendation	Total Investment Required	Payback Timescale Years	Annual Other Cost £	Annual Cashable Saving £	Annual Non cashable Saving £
Countryside Access - HCC Investment £250,000 p.a.					
Recommendation 4 - Undertaking with partners a project to compile information on all informal outdoor recreational opportunities (both public and private sector) in Hertfordshire and to make this information publicly available by April 2004.	Current Projects Budget £15k plus partners/sponsor contributions		Unspecified officer time required to update database but possibilities for external sponsorship to offset/meet costs.	0	0

Recommendation Asset Management - HCC Investment £95,000 p.a.	Total Investment Required	Payback Timescale Years	Annual Other Cost £	Annual Cashable Saving £	Annual Non cashable Saving £
The review recommends that the County Council should:					
Recommendation 5 - Develop Aldenham Country Park over the next 5 years as an attractive recreation site, with the aim of becoming more self-sufficient and which offers a range of high quality facilities for users.	<p>Additional resources.</p> <p>The ACP Development Plan indicates a range of options from zero to £350,000 over 5 years.</p> <p>Potential sources of any additional investment include private sector partners and local authorities</p> <p>£10,000 from current projects budget to prioritise actions and explore additional funding opportunities</p>	<p>Additional investment could lead to increased visitors producing increased income to enable a more self-sufficient management approach to the Park.</p>	<p>0</p>	<p>0</p>	

		<p>Examples include:</p> <p>£10,000 to provide more parking bays could yield an additional £2,400 p.a. - 4 years</p> <p>£55,000 in wet weather shelters and kiosk improvements could yield an additional £3,500 p.a. – 16 years</p> <p>£25,000 for classroom improvements could increase number of schoolchildren visiting the site by 3000. Could produce a return of £6750 p.a. – 4 years</p>			<p>More parking would reduce the amount of illegal parking when the park is full. Resolving an issue with the Police.</p> <p>Provide more income outside of the summer to attract and retain visitors</p> <p>ACP meeting educational needs of local schoolchildren</p>
--	--	---	--	--	--

Recommendation Asset Management - HCC Investment £95,000 p.a.	Total Investment Required	Payback Timescale Years	Annual Other Cost £	Annual Cashable Saving £	Annual Non cashable Saving £
The Review recommends that in order to reduce its liability the County Council should:					
Recommendation 6 – Consider the disposal or decommissioning of non-strategic recreation sites (Treasures Grove and Paradise Piggeries); investigate the feasibility of transferring the management responsibilities of St. Margaret's Wood and Wilbury Hill to other public bodies; retain Symondshyde; and introduce alternative management regimes for the remaining recreation sites (Cole Green Way, Ayot Greenway, Riverside Way and Broxbourne/Bencroft Woods).	<p>Current sites maintenance budget</p> <p>The decommissioning of Paradise Piggeries will cost £5,000 to remove play equipment, barrier the car park and make the site safe.</p> <p>Site currently subject to a litter picking contract worth £1000 p.a. that covers 4-5 sites. No other maintenance is currently carried out.</p>	<p>The County Council will need to invest up to £15,000 to provide safe play equipment over next 5 years.</p>	<p>0</p>	<p>£200 pa</p>	<p>0</p>

Recommendation	Total Investment Required	Payback Timescale Years	Annual Other Cost £	Annual Cashable Saving £	Annual Non cashable Saving £
Information Communication Technology - HCC investment £375,000 p.a.					
The Review recommends that in order to promote access to environmental information and advice:					
Recommendation 7 - The Environmental Management Group (EMG) should implement, by March 2004, a strategy for making a specified range of its environmental information publicly available via the Environment Channel on HertsDirect.	Current Projects Budget - £15,000 2002/04 - plus Heritage Lottery Funding – in line with E-Govt. targets	0	0	0	£5,000 p.a. based on reduced call handling of around 40% (based on current Internet access and call rates)
Recommendation 8 - The County Council, should by March 2003, provide public access via HertsDirect to the environmental information and advice offered by other partners e.g. Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT), Hertfordshire Gardens Trust (HGT) and Groundwork.	Existing Staff Time	April 2004 when links to Environment Channel are achieved	0	0	0

<p>Recommendation 9. The potential for enhancing the delivery of Environmental Management Group's (EMG) environmental advice services through ICT should be explored through a pilot project with a specific district council by March 2003. This should lead the way to ICT being the primary method of communication with public sector partners by March 2005.</p>	Existing Staff Time	Successful completion of pilot project by March 2003	0	0	<p>Estimated as at least £1250 p.a. as a result of being able to respond quicker.</p> <p>The real benefits would arise if planning applications were available digitally. This improvement could provide at least £5000 of benefits in reduced time.</p>
--	---------------------	--	---	---	--

Recommendation Land Management HCC Investment £150,000 p.a.	Total Investment Required	Payback Timescale Years	Annual Other Cost £	Annual Cashable Saving £	Annual Non cashable Saving £
<p>The Review recommends that in order to secure best value from its investment in agri-environment work the County Council should:</p>					

Recommendation 10 - In partnership with the Hertfordshire Rural Forum, lead on the development of a Land Management Plan for Hertfordshire, to be completed by September 2003.	Current Projects Budget - £10,000 – will help to fill policy gap and underscore the BVPP Promise – "We will work with the community to protect and enhance our environment"	September 2003 when the Land Management Plan will be published	0	0	Strategy could be a bidding document enabling targeted investment and income generation.
Recommendation 11 - Review its investment in those services which promote and advise on agri-environment matters once the Land Management Plan has been produced.	Existing Staff Time	2004/05 when the investment will be guided by the principles of the Land Management Plan	0	0	More focused advisory service, will attract continued regional and national funding streams

Recommendation Service Development	Total Investment Required	Payback Timescale Years	Annual Other Cost £	Annual Cashable Saving £	Annual Non cashable Saving £
The Review recommends the following actions to improve service delivery:					

<p>Recommendation 12 - From April 2002 the Landscape Service should be delivered in accordance with a specification agreed by EMG with the service's key clients / stakeholders, ensuring effective support for the development control process and the provision of strategic policy advice.</p>	Existing Staff Time	Specification completed by April 2002.	0	0	Better specified service will enable the resource of 1 FTE to concentrate on work to do with the Structure Plan and Minerals applications.
<p>Recommendation 13 - EMG should, by September 2002, produce a new specification (in partnership with users and Local Authorities) for its built environment advisory service. This process will also address the long-term arrangements for procuring the service and the need for urban design advice in Hertfordshire</p>	Existing Staff Time	Specification completed by September 2002.	0	0	More targeted specification of this service will enable a better response to issues of built design.
<p>Recommendation 14 - EMG should, in partnership with the Environment Department's Forward Planning Unit, seek to ensure that the proposed changes to the Structure Plan Annual Monitoring Report addresses the need to monitor the effectiveness of environmental and landscape conservation policies.</p>	Existing Staff Time	Linked to the Structure Plan Annual Monitoring cycle	0	0	Ensure that policies are audited regularly to gauge their impact on the County's environment.

Recommendation 15 - EMG should develop and implement, from April 2002, a systematic programme and procedures for influencing key local, regional and national policy documents.	Existing Staff Time	Example would be supporting the Executive Member on the Regional Rural Affairs Forum from 2002 onwards	0	0	Greater influence within emerging areas and identification of funding opportunities.
Recommendation 16 - In 2002-2003, EMG should assess whether it has taken full advantage of the opportunities for securing environmental enhancements through the planning process. In response to this assessment, service improvements will be made.	Existing Staff Time	Report produced by September 2003. Success will be linked to annual monitoring process (recommendation 14)	0	0	Making the most of S.106 opportunities to enhance the environment of the County.
Recommendation Service Development	Total Investment Required	Payback Timescale Years	Annual Other Cost £	Annual Cashable Saving £	Annual Non cashable Saving £
Recommendation 17 - EMG should undertake regular surveys of stakeholders and users of its facilities and services.	Current Projects Budget - £10,000 p.a.	In line with County Council commitments to listening to service-users.	0	0	In line with the County Council's policy positive consultation.

Total	£75,000 from existing budgets	0	£1000	£200	55,450
Net cash saving	0	0	0	0	
Net investment required to be bid for as part of the capital programme	£0-350,000 for ACP				

Appendix 2

Environmental Management Best Value Review

Improvement Plan

March 2002

Appendix 2: Detailed Improvement Plan

Countryside Access

	Recommendation	Resource implications	Estimated source of funding	Performance monitoring (Indicators and targets)
	The Review recommends that the County Council should seek to improve Countryside Access by:			
1	Actively promoting an approach, from April 2002, that builds upon the Parish Paths Partnership (P3) to encourage and enable community involvement in the improvement and promotion of access on the public rights of way network and that the County Council continues to fund P3 at the current level.	Officer Time	Existing Resources	The approach and investment will be reviewed in the context of the County Access Strategy (September 2003), the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and the Rights of Way Best Value Review during 2004/05.

A	That all works on the public rights of way network undertaken through P3 are carried out in accordance with the Rights of Way Good Practice Guide.	Officer time – Good Practice Guide endorsed by Executive Committee January 2001	Existing Resources	Works are in accordance with the Good Practice Guide from April 2002.
B	That the existing protocol between Countryside Management Service (CMS) and Rights of Way with regard to P3 is reviewed by both parties to ensure co-ordination and effective use of resources and a revised version included in the Good Practice Guide	Officer time	Existing Resources	New version included in Good Practice Guide Version 2 by April 2002.
C	CMS and Rights of Way to review the formal P3/Parish agreement to reflect the revised approach.	Officer time	Existing Resources	Revised agreement is drawn up by April 2002.
D	In order to agree P3 and other targets, CMS undertake an audit of Hertfordshire parishes to assess current and potential community involvement in the improvement and promotion of access on the public rights of way network.	Survey of parishes / Officer time	Existing Resources	Audit is completed by April 2002. Clear target parishes are identified for future years.

E	That Countryside Access Officers from the Rights of Way unit adopt an approach that encourages and enables community involvement in the improvement and promotion of access on the public rights of way network in non-P3 areas.	Officer time and works budget	Existing resources	Number of non-P3 parishes engaged per year.
F	That CMS Officers adopt an approach that encourages and enables community involvement in the improvement and promotion of access on the public rights of way network in existing and target P3 areas.	Officer time and works budget	Existing resources	Number of target parishes signing up to P3 per year.
G	That criteria are established to ensure the allocation of P3 grants in a way that balances the County Council's priorities as Highway Authority with the needs of local organisations.	Officer time to discuss criteria	Existing Resources	Clear criteria are agreed between CMS and Rights of Way by April 2003.

2	Dedicating a number of routes across its' own recreation sites as public rights of way in order to secure long term access and management by April 2004.	Rights of Way officer time	Existing resources	Complete dedications by April 2004.
A	This set of improvement actions will be considered within the context of the Access Strategy and the emerging Rights of Way Improvement Plans. An approach is suggested under Items B-G below.			
B	Dedicate bridleway along eastern edge of Wilbury Hill forming part of the Icknield way.	Officer time	Existing resources	Complete dedication by April 2003.
C	Dedicate Riverside Way as a public right of way	Officer time	Existing resources	Complete dedication by April 2002.
D	Dedicate track bed of Cole Green Way between A414 and Hertford viaduct as bridleway / Restricted Byway	Officer time	Existing resources	Complete dedication by April 2003.
E	Enter negotiations with Lafarge Redland about dedicating the western section of the Cole Green Way (from A414 to Blackfan Road) and the western section of the Ayot Greenway	Officer time	Existing resources	Seek dedication by April 2004.

F	Dedicate Ayot Greenway track bed as bridleway / restricted byway	Officer time	Existing resources	Complete dedication by April 2003.
G	Dedicate a series of bridleways and footpaths within the Broxbourne and Bencroft wood complex.	Officer time	Existing resources	Complete dedication by April 2003.
3	<p>Engaging with partners to produce an Access Strategy for Hertfordshire in order to co-ordinate and guide investment in informal outdoor recreation in the county by September 2003.</p> <p><i>This will use information provided by the Best Value Reference Group and identify where links need to be made to existing plans and strategies e.g. Rights of Way Improvement Plan, Local Transport Plan etc.</i></p>	Officer time plus £10,000 to undertake and complete any consultation process	Existing resources partners	<p>Scope to be produced by September 2002.</p> <p>Strategy to be produced by September 2003.</p> <p>Targets to be included in strategy.</p>

<p>4</p>	<p>Undertaking with partners a project to compile information on all informal outdoor recreational opportunities (both public and private sector) in Hertfordshire and to make this information publicly available by April 2004.</p>	<p>Officer time to undertake project management and £15,000 for data collection and development of the digital database.</p> <p>Production of parallel publication will be delivered through sponsorship to cover printing costs etc.</p>	<p>Existing resources Gateway / Partners</p>	<p>A database of sites and facilities across County to be established by April 2003. Phased introduction of access information from April 2003. Formal launch of public access portal on HertsDirect in April 2004.</p> <p>Monitor number of hits on website.</p> <p>Production of publication to follow "electronic" work programme.</p>
-----------------	--	--	---	--

Asset Management

	Recommendation	Resource implications	Estimated source of funding	Performance monitoring (Indicators + targets)
5	<p>The Review recommends that the County Council should;</p> <p>Develop Aldenham Country Park over the next 5 years as an attractive recreation site, with the aim of becoming more self-sufficient and which offers a range of high quality facilities for users.</p> <p>Investment in the Country park could be achieved through some of the following options:</p>	<p>See below for details about each option</p>		
A	<p>Undertaking a review of the financial basis of the proposals contained within the Aldenham Country Park Development Plan</p> <p>Ensure that the proposals in the Plan are deliverable and will enable the Park to become self financing</p>	<p>Officer time plus up to £10,000 consultants to cover work that be required for actions associated with 5 B, C and D.</p>	Existing resources	Report outcomes of review to GMT by June 2002.

B	Investigating opportunities for a public/private partnership at Aldenham Country Park to provide improved facilities and enable the park to become self-financing.	Officer time plus up to £10,000 consultants to cover work that be required for actions associated with 5 B, C and D.	Existing resources	Establish possible partners by Oct 2002.
C	Investigating the opportunity to secure contributions from adjoining local authorities whose residents use the Park to contribute to the running and the development of the park.	Officer time plus up to £10,000 consultants to cover work that be required for actions associated with 5 B, C and D.	Existing resources	Secure contributions from neighbouring authorities by Oct 2002.
D	Through the re-prioritisation of the Environment Department revenue expenditure increase the County Council's investment in Aldenham	Officer Time	Existing resources	Investigate opportunities through budget process from May 2002. Delivery of the Park Plan through investment
E	Making a capital bid to the County Council to fund the implementation of the Park Plan as part the capital programme from 2003/04.	Officer Time	Bid against County Council's Capital Programme	Make capital bid in October 2002. Delivery of the Park Plan through investment

6	<p>The Review recommends that in order to reduce its liability the County Council should:</p> <p>Make the resources available to dispose of or decommission non-strategic recreation sites (Treasures Grove and Paradise Piggeries); Investigate the feasibility of transferring the management responsibilities of St. Margaret's Wood and Wilbury Hill to other public bodies; Retain Symondshyde; and Implement alternative management regimes for the remaining recreation sites (Cole Green Way, Ayot Greenway, Riverside Way and Broxbourne/Bencroft Woods.).</p>	See individual actions below	Existing budgets	
A	EMG will close Paradise Piggeries car park and cease maintenance of mown rides	Officer time	£5,000 required to undertake decommissioning works from existing budgets	Implement from April 2002
B	EMG will investigate the transfer of St. Margaret's Wood to appropriate public body.	Officer time and possible dowry to cover annual liabilities	Existing resources	To transfer by April 2003.

C	EMG will engage organisations that could more appropriately manage Wilbury Hill and negotiate its transfer i.e. Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation or HMWT. Need to ensure protection of wildlife site and archaeological site	Officer time and possible dowry to cover annual liabilities	Existing resources	To transfer by April 2003.
D	EMG to allow remainder of Riverside Way site to regenerate and discuss possibility of being managed as part of county woodland with Amey or Herts Property	Officer time	Existing resources	Resolve future management options by April 2003.
E	EMG to discuss transfer of woodland around eastern end of the Ayot Greenway (bordering Sherrardspark Wood) with Welwyn Hatfield DC	Officer time	Existing resources	Implement transfer from April 2003.
F	EMG to enter agreement with CMS or other partner to deliver management plan for Broxbourne Bencroft wood complex and NNR	Officer time	Existing resources	Implement agreement from April 2003.

Information + Communication Technology

	Recommendation	Resource implications	Estimated source of funding	Performance monitoring (Indicators + targets)
	The Review recommends that in order to promote access to environmental information and advice:			
7	<p>The Environmental Management Group will implement a strategy, by March 2004, for making a specified range of its environmental information publicly available via the Environment Channel on HertsDirect.</p> <p><i>The strategy will include information relating to: ecology (Wildlife Sites, Veteran Trees, certain species data), archaeology (SMR), listed buildings and landscape character.</i></p>	<p>Officer time: ES&A, HBRC, Historic Environment, Landscape. Consultancy fees for BEAMS.</p> <p>Estimated £15,000 for preparation of ecology information</p>	<p>Existing resources.</p> <p>HLF funding for Historic Environment.</p>	<p>Implementation from April 2002.</p> <p>Completion of strategy by March 2004.</p> <p>Number of data sets publicly available on HertsDirect.</p> <p>Number of "hits" on website.</p>

<p>8</p>	<p>The County Council will provide, by March 2003, public access via HertsDirect to the environmental information and advice offered by other partners (e.g. HMWT, HGT and Groundwork).</p> <p>EMG will include within the Environment Channel signposts to other organisations (in the public and private sectors) which can advise on the procurement of specialist services such as hydrology, noise, water, geology and contaminated land.</p>	<p>Officer time: ES&A HBRC HE Landscape</p>	<p>Existing resources</p>	<p>Establish links with these service via HertsDirect by March 2003.</p> <p>Inclusion of relevant information and links in Environment Channel by March 2004.</p>
<p>9</p>	<p>The potential for enhancing the delivery of environmental advice services through ICT will be explored through a pilot project with a specific district council by March 2003. This should lead the way to ICT being the primary method of communication with public sector partners by March 2005.</p>	<p>Officer time: ES&A, HBRC, HE.</p>	<p>Existing resources</p>	<p>Successful completion of pilot by March 2003.</p>

A	The pilot ICT project should particularly focus on the development control process and lead the way to ICT being the primary method of communication (i.e. exchange of advice and planning information) between HCC's environmental information/advisory services and their public sector partners.	Officer time	Existing resources	To establish ICT as the main method of communication by March 2005. Number of partners where ICT is the principle method of communication. Percentage of services accessible / delivered by ICT (Implementing Electronic Government targets).
B	The use of ICT to provide an integrated record of responses to consultations (particularly planning applications) by all services within the Environment Department should be examined in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and promote joint working. The Review recommends that this matter be addressed by the Environment Board.	Officer time: ES&A to prepare report for Environment Board.	Existing resources	Environment Board to consider report produced by EMG in September 2002.

Land Management

	Recommendation	Resource implications	Estimated source of funding	Performance monitoring (Indicators + targets)
	The Review recommends that in order to secure best value from its investment in agri-environment work the County Council should			
10	In partnership with the Herts Rural Forum, lead on the development of a Land Management Plan for Hertfordshire to be completed by September 2003.	Officer time: ES&A, CMS, HBRC, HE, ELMS, Woodland, Landscape. Possibly consultant's fees of up to £10,000.	Existing resources	Scope of plan to be agreed by GMT by September 2002 following consultation. Seek endorsement of County Council. Publication of Plan in September 2003. Number of organisations giving written support to the Plan
A	In order to inform the implementation of the Land Management Plan, the County Council will seek within existing resources and priorities to facilitate the completion of the Landscape Character Assessment for the remainder of the county by April 2005	Officer Time	Existing resources	County coverage achieved by April 2005.

11	Review its investment in those services which promote and advise on agri-environment matters once the Land Management Plan has been produced.	Officer time	Existing resources	Minuted review of budget and service performance by GMT in April 2003.
A	CMS should secure a process for the prioritisation of its agri-environment advisory service and for monitoring the long term success and benefits of Environmental Land Management schemes funded by the County Council	Officer time	Existing resources	Implementation of agreed monitoring procedure from April 2002.

Service Development

	Recommendation	Resource implications	Estimated sources of funding	Performance monitoring (Indicators + targets)
	The Review recommends the following actions to improve service delivery:			
12	<p>From April 2002 the Landscape Service will be delivered in accordance with a specification agreed by EMG with the service's key clients / stakeholders, ensuring effective support for the development control process and the provision of strategic policy advice.</p> <p>This specification to be reviewed annually.</p>	Officer time: ES&A Landscape	Existing resources	<p>Implementation of agreed specification from April 2002.</p> <p>Performance indicators to be agreed with clients and reviewed annually.</p>
A	The potential for certain planning applications on which County Development Unit currently consults the Landscape Service to be handled by the County Woodland Officer should be tested.	Officer time: circa 15% of Woodland Officer time dedicated to development control.	Existing resources	<p>Test capacity during 2002/03.</p> <p>Number of relevant consultations satisfactorily responded to between April 2002 and March 2003.</p>

13	EMG should, by September 2002, produce a new specification (in partnership with users and Local Authorities) for its built environment advisory service. This process will also address the long-term arrangements for procuring the service, securing built environment advice and the need for urban design advice in Hertfordshire.	Officer time (ES&A and HE) and consultants costs (BEAMS).	Existing resources.	<p>Completion of new specification by September 2002.</p> <p>Presentation of options for a strategic built environment advice service in partnership with district councils to HCTOA by September 2002.</p> <p>Take conclusions to GMT for consideration by April 2003.</p> <p>Percentage of consultations from Strategy Group satisfactorily responded to per year.</p>
14	EMG should, in partnership with the County Council's Forward Planning Unit, seek to ensure that the proposed changes to the Structure Plan Annual Monitoring Report address the need to monitor the effectiveness of environmental and landscape conservation policies.	Officer time: ES&A, HBRC, HE, Landscape, Woodland.	Existing resources	Submission of detailed proposals for changes to the AMR to Strategy Group. (Timing dependant on Structure Plan timetable – probably 2002-03)

15	EMG should develop and implement, from April 2002, a systematic programme and procedures for commenting on and influencing key local, regional and national policy documents.	Officer time: ES&A, HBRC, HE, Landscape, Woodland.	Existing resources	Introduction of policy development programme to be monitored on quarterly basis from April 2002.
16	In 2002-2003, EMG will assess whether it has taken full advantage of the opportunities for securing environmental enhancements through the planning process. In response to this assessment, service improvements will be made.	Officer time	Existing resources	Report to GMT by September 2003.
A	EMG will ensure, through internal training, that appropriate staff have a full understanding of planning agreements and have the capacity to engage in negotiations relating to Section 106 agreements.	Officer time	Existing resources	Internal training seminar organised by March 2003.
17	EMG will undertake regular surveys of stakeholders and users of its facilities and services.	Officer time plus £10,000 in survey costs	Existing resources	Process to begin in February 2002 and thereafter follow an annual programme linked to the Service Plan and Budget processes.

A	Annual meeting of the key stakeholders in order to share service planning and work programmes. Developing a joint understanding of each others services.	Officer Time	Existing resources	Annual meetings starting February 2002.
B	Annual meeting with staff to identify key Service Plan issues. Ensure that staff are aware of the Service Planning issues and can contribute to the development of the Plan	Officer Time	Existing resources	Annual staff meeting starting November 2002. Interim meeting February 2002.
C	Undertake user surveys with County and District Council for development control and policy advice services provided by EMG.	Officer Time	Existing resources	Undertake user surveys in October 2002.
D	On site surveys of Aldenham Country Park and Recreation Sites (July-August).	Officer Time plus £10,000 survey work	Existing Resources	Specific site surveys during Summer 2002.

Glossary of abbreviations used in the Improvement Plan

AMR – Annual Monitoring Report;
BEAMS – Built Environment Advisory and Management Service;
CDU – County Development Unit;
CMS – Countryside Management Service;
DLG – Derelict Land Grant;
EB – Environment Board
ELMS – Environmental Land Management Service;
EMG – Environmental Management Group;
ES&A – Environment Strategy & Action;
GMT – Group Management Team on Environmental Management Group;
HBRC – Herts Biological Records Centre;
HCC - Herts County Council;
HE – Historic Environment;
HGT – Herts Gardens Trust;
HLF – Heritage Lottery Fund;
HMWT – Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust;
HTCOA – Herts Chief Technical Officers Association;
ICT – Information Communication Technology;
NNR – National Nature Reserve;
P3 – Parish Paths Partnership;
SMR – Sites and Monuments Record;
WHDC – Welwyn Hatfield District Council