

Subject: Valley of Stone

Status: For Publication

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Report to: The Cabinet

Date: 13<sup>th</sup> December 2006

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Report of: The Head of Economic Regeneration and Strategic Housing

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Portfolio

Holder: Cabinet Member for Regeneration

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Key Decision: NO

Forward Plan

General Exception

Special Urgency

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## 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Rossendale Borough Council's support for the Valley of Stone project, and in particular to seek agreement that Rossendale Borough Council, as land owner/tenant for some of the sites included in the project, becomes a partner in the project. This would enable Groundwork Rossendale to enter onto the site to undertake any planned work but would also place a requirement on the Borough Council to support a future inspection and maintenance programme which will have a direct cost implication for the Council.

## 2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 2.1 The matters discussed in this report are linked to and support the following corporate priorities:
- The Environment is widely acknowledged as one of Rossendale's key assets. At the same time it is also acknowledged that we do not do enough to maximize the value of this asset, particularly in promoting Rossendale as a great place to live, visit and invest. The value of a scheme such as the Valley of Stone extends however beyond the promotion of the borough and can contribute to a wide range of our corporate objective including culture, health and education.*

### **3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS**

3.1 All the issues raised and the recommendation(s) in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:

- Quarries are by their very nature dangerous places and even disused quarries have hazards that could constitute a risk to visitors, whether at the invitation or not of the land owner. A key concern of the Borough Council in considering its position in respect of this project must therefore be the potential liabilities that are placed on the Council by inviting a larger number of people to enjoy these quarries. It is important however to recognize that work has already been undertaken by Rossendale Borough Council through the Quarries Reclamation Programme which has gone some way to encouraging the use of these quarries by walkers. The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 also introduced the 'right to roam' over designated land including areas of open country and registered common land. These risks therefore already exist, albeit the exposure is likely to be less as walkers and visitors are not encouraged to these sites in the numbers that could be once the preservation, improvement and interpretation works have been undertaken. At the same time however this project provides us with an opportunity to address the current risks with the injection of capital investment and to invest in appropriate measures e.g. fencing and signage to encourage and facilitate the safe use of these sites. It is also important to note that we will be required to demonstrate that we have an adequate inspection and maintenance regime to ensure that we fulfill our obligations as landowners on these sites. These are however measures that we really should already have in place to protect both visitors to the quarry and the authority from any subsequent insurance claims.

### **4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS**

4.1 The overall aim of the Valley of Stone project is to raise the profile and accessibility of Rossendale's unique stone quarry heritage, to secure its future conservation and to contribute to the cultural economy and well being of local communities.

4.2 Rossendale had a significant stone quarrying industry during the nineteenth and early twentieth century which has shaped the present day landscape and is now recognized as a significant heritage asset. The Valley of Stone project proposes to preserve and enhance the quarries as archaeological relics and encourage more community engagement by improving access to and awareness and understanding of this heritage as a local resource for learning. It will focus on a number of sites which have been identified in previous archaeological and conservation surveys as culturally, historically and environmentally important. Fundamental to the development of the project has been the adaptation of the concept of the 'Eco museum' – a museum without walls, which involves local people in protecting their heritage and providing an educational resource for the future. Further information regarding the Valley of Stone project can be found at [www.valleyofstone.org.uk](http://www.valleyofstone.org.uk)

- 4.3 Groundwork Rossendale, who are leading the project, have already successfully undertaken two previous phases of the project primarily working on site surveys, early work with schools and community groups and the protection of key features under immediate threat. The third phase of the project is much larger and plans to invest nearly £500,000 of Heritage Lottery funding over three years in conserving, enhancing and interpreting the landscape in ways that re-engage visitors with the landscapes history and geology.
- 4.4 Of the sites identified for inclusion in this third phase, two – Thurns Head and Cragg quarries – are either within the ownership of the Borough Council (Cragg) or leased to the Borough Council (Thurns Head). The proposed work identified for each of these sites differs both in scale and content with Thurns Head Quarry being identified within the project’s four major ‘flagship’ sites. This means that at Thurns Head measures to improve access and create a heritage trail will be undertaken in addition to any conservation work. At Cragg a minimum amount of conservation work is proposed. In addition to the work in the quarries themselves it is also proposed to develop a number of town trails, with appropriate interpretation, that will require the agreement of the Borough Council before being implemented.
- 4.5 As part of a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the third phase of the project Groundwork must be able to demonstrate that all the relevant landowners are partners to the project. The Borough Council have therefore been approached by Groundwork in their role as both the local authority for the area and as a landowner potentially affected by the project.
- 4.6 In response to this project proposal the Borough Council commissioned Zurich to further develop their previous report on the Borough’s quarries to include a more detailed consideration of Thurns Head and Cragg Quarries. The outcome of this work has been discussed with Groundwork to ensure that wherever possible our concerns are addressed within the proposed schemes. A number of Zurich’s recommendations relate to the Borough Council’s management and monitoring/inspection of these sites and would apply regardless of whether this particular project proceeds. A sum has been included within the Heritage Lottery Fund bid for maintenance and inspection but this relates only to the period that the project is ‘live’ (three years). The number of years that individual sites will benefit from this supported maintenance regime will depend on when they are brought forward within the three year programme. Maintenance and inspection costs beyond this initial period would need to be borne by the Borough Council. These costs are estimated to be in the region of £8,000 per annum.

## **5. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF FINANCIAL SERVICES**

- 5.1 The proposal has no immediate financial impact as estimated annual maintenance costs of c. £8000 do not impact on the Council until three years time. As stated in the report the scheme will assist the Council in mitigating its risks as a land owner.

## 6. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

- 6.1 The report identifies in paragraph 3.1 that potential liabilities are placed on the council. Zurich have confirmed that they are in agreement with the contents of this report

## 7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The Valley of Stone project offers a real opportunity for the Borough to begin to maximise its natural and built heritage in ways that will be beneficial to both residents and visitors to Rossendale. As such there are significant advantages to the Borough Council from getting involved in the project. However, there are also direct implications that the Borough Council need to take into account when deciding whether it wants to commit to the project particularly in respect of on-going maintenance and risk management. In making any decision the Borough Council should be mindful that the issues around maintenance and risk-management already exist, though to perhaps a lesser extent, and the project does offer an opportunity to put some capital resource into addressing the current situation.

## 8. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 8.1 That Rossendale Borough Council supports the Heritage Lottery Fund bid for the Valley of Stone project and agrees in principle to the proposed works being undertaken on any land that is owned or leased by the Borough Council, subject to the final details of the individual schemes being agreed by officers of the Council.
- 8.2 That provision is made in future annual budgets to meet the on-going maintenance and inspection costs, estimated to be in the region of £8,000 per annum.

<b>Contact Officer</b>	
Name	Sarah Dunn
Position	Economic Regeneration Manager
Service / Team	Economic Regeneration and Spatial Development
Telephone	01706 252421
Email address	sarahdunn@rossendalebc.gov.uk

Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
Valley of Stone HLF project proposal	Economic Regeneration and Strategic Housing Service, Room 120, Futures Park.
Valley of Stone Project File	