

**NORTH WEST COAST
DISCOVERY TRAIL :
IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK**

Consultative Report Executive Summary



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NORTH WEST COAST DISCOVERY TRAIL - IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Implementation Framework

The Implementation Framework is intended to guide and assist partner organisations in progressing the proposed Coastal Trail from the concept stage to the development stage. It recommends preliminary investigations and strategies, sets out an initial 5-year Project Management Programme and longer-term Implementation Programme and recommends organisational arrangements for the development, management and marketing of the Trail.

Considerations from the Feasibility Study and Development of Other Trails

Following a summary of the findings of the *North West Coast Discovery Trail - Concept Feasibility Study* and confirmation of the support of many potential partner organisations for the Trail concept, the report highlights lessons from other trails and cycle routes, including -

- a. Key considerations in respect of Trail planning and development -
 - need for realism, in respect of timescales for Trail development
 - a Trail development strategy and action plan is required from the outset
 - sustainable approaches should be adopted to Trail construction and management
 - high standards for Trail development, maintenance, amenities and services should be agreed at an early stage
 - wherever feasible, the Coastal Trail should be accessible and comply with the Disabilities Discrimination legislation
 - the support of communities, user groups, landowners and tourism businesses should be sought from the outset.
- b. Important considerations relating to trail management arrangements include -
 - need for early commitments from partner organisations - e.g. a partnership agreement
 - a partnership management structure should be established at the earliest opportunity
 - a small Coastal Trail Coordination Unit, comprising a Coastal Trail Officer and support staff, should be employed to lead Trail development and coordinate funding, work on the ground, etc.
 - strong links are required with tourism marketing and development bodies.
- c. Funding considerations include -
 - need for realism in respect of funding requirements - for example, over £20m has been invested in developing and marketing the Trans Pennine Trail
 - major strategic funding support (e.g. HLF, Countryside Agency, Millennium Commission funding) has been crucial to recent trail development initiatives
 - requirements for longer-term commitments to staff and maintenance expenditures
 - early appraisal of potential economic impacts of trail use can demonstrate a trail's potential contribution to regional and local economies and support funding bids.

Preliminary Investigations and Strategies

The Implementation Framework identifies a need for early action to progress preliminary investigations and strategies, which will -

- a. provide baseline datasets - e.g. condition of existing sections of Trail, user characteristics
- b. identify strengths, weaknesses, gaps and opportunities relating to specific aspects of the Trail - e.g. shortfalls in surface conditions or signing, gaps in accommodation provision
- c. set out an action programme for Trail development, improvements, services, etc.
- d. identify funding requirements, potential funders and a programme to secure funding
- e. assess potential user market and economic impacts of the Trail and related programmes.

The following **preliminary investigations and strategies** are recommended and the report outlines the purpose, key considerations, main tasks, indicative costs, timescales and skills requirements for each -

1. Trail survey and infrastructure development strategy
2. River and estuary crossings options assessment
3. Asset management strategy and trail management system
4. Funding strategy
5. Business plan for the proposed Coastal Trail Partnership
6. Baseline use/user survey and monitoring programme
7. Market and economic impact assessment
8. Marketing strategy
9. Community inclusion and involvement strategy
10. Communications strategy
11. Web site development and maintenance
12. Interpretation and education strategy
13. Trail user services audit and development programme
14. Public transport audit and 'green travel' strategy
15. Trail design and visitor management demonstration projects.

Recommendations for Project Management and Implementation Programmes

The importance of the effective and timely completion of the preliminary investigations and strategies is emphasised and a **Project Management Programme** is recommended, which illustrates the inter-linkages and inter-dependencies between these and shows how they may be progressed over an initial 5-year period. A longer-term (10+ year) **Implementation Programme** illustrates how the various investigations and strategies will lead into the development of the Trail infrastructure and delivery of other Trail-related programmes.

It is recommended that the Project Management Programme should cover the period 2005/6 to 2009/10, enabling the completion and official launch of first stages of the Trail (e.g. Chester to Southport, Lytham to Morecambe and St. Bees/Coast-to-Coast Path to Carlisle/Hadrian's Wall Path sections) and an initial Website by 2010. The spread of the initial investigations and strategies over the first 5-year period starting in 2005/6 is dependent on substantive funding being available by 2005/6, and recognises that several strategies are dependent on information from preceding assessments and that there will be significant project management tasks associated with the investigations and strategies, but a limited project management capabilities.

Indicative costs of the preliminary investigations and strategies within the Project Management Programme are £0.53-0.63m (excluding implementation, staff costs and VAT). These estimates must be seen in the context of -

- a. the Trail providing a major new regional and national recreational, tourism, environmental and community asset and delivering a range of public policy objectives
- b. potential for the Trail to attract significant new visits and generate major day visitors' and tourists' expenditures and associated income and employment (e.g. users of Pembrokeshire Coast Path spent £14m/year and supported 567 jobs in 1996/7)
- c. potential to spread the costs amongst a range of partner organisations; several of which are committed to, or considering, major investments in sections of the proposed Trail or in related projects (e.g. Mersey Waterfront Way, Ribble Regional Park, Cumbria's Coastal Beacon Projects, potential southwards extension of the Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail)
- d. requirements for sound planning of the multi-£m investment, which will be required over the next 10 years to develop, manage and market a top-class, multi-use Coastal Trail.

Key challenges for the partner organisations will include -

- ensuring that costs are shared amongst the local authorities and other organisations
- securing strategic funding support
- making an early start to Trail programmes - including, to take advantage of funding sources, which may only be available for a restricted period (e.g. rural recovery funding).

Completion of the Implementation Programme within the recommended 10-year period should enable **completion and launch of the Coastal Trail by 2015**, subject to adequate funding being available for the preliminary investigations, strategies and infrastructure works from 2005/6 onwards.

An outline risk assessment is provided, which identifies potential funding shortfalls and time delays as posing the greatest threats to effective progress on the Trail programmes. Funding and timely progress on the following programmes will be critical to the overall Trail development programme -

Programme 1. Trail survey and infrastructure development strategy

Programme 4. Funding strategy

Programme 5. Business plan for the proposed Coastal Trail Partnership.

Effective progress will be required on the other recommended programmes; especially, -

Programme 2. River and estuary crossings options assessments

Programme 3. Asset management strategy and trail management system

Programme 7. Market and economic impact assessment

Programme 8. Marketing strategy.

Recommendations for Organisational Arrangements to Progress the Trail

Prior to recommending an organisational structure to 'drive', advise and assist the development, management and marketing of the Coastal Trail, the report indicates potential partner organisations and identifies -

a. strengths or opportunities relating to organisations currently associated with the Trail -

- enthusiasm and support of several key individuals and organisations
- local knowledge and expertise in public rights of way, cycleways and related aspects of trail development amongst staff of the local authorities, AONB units, Sustrans, etc.
- existing strategic paths and cycle routes, which will comprise sections of the Trail
- partner organisations' supportive strategies and programmes
- range of potential funding sources - e.g. local transport plan, rural recovery funds
- potential for voluntary support, such as voluntary rangers.

b. apparent weaknesses and/or potential threats -

- lack of a dedicated lead body with appropriate corporate and staff capabilities
- varying levels of commitment and support from partner organisations
- uncertainties and potential delays, which may arise from the reorganisation of tourism functions and local government in the North West
- potential delays in securing funding and progress on the Trail and problems of sustaining investment, especially for Trail maintenance
- problems of maintaining the impetus, interest and support of 'key players' and potential issues arising from agency arrangements for local authority functions (e.g. out-sourcing of rights of way services in Cumbria)
- variations in standards of route and associated services.

Having considered organisational requirements for the effective development, management and marketing of the proposed Coastal Trail, including optional organisational formats (e.g. joint committee, partnership, company structures), the consultants recommend that -

1. **the partner organisations should establish a North West Coastal Trail Partnership** - through a formal partnership agreement, which sets out the basis for joint working to develop, manage and market the proposed North West Coast Discovery Trail
2. **scope should be provided, within the partnership agreement, for the establishment of a North West Coastal Trail Company** - as a subsidiary, not-for-profit company to employ the proposed Trail staff and deliver Trail-related projects and programmes, where the fiscal and legal benefits of a company limited by guarantee may be advantageous
3. **the proposed Partnership should review its status after the first three years of its operation** - with a view to considering whether company status may prove advantageous
4. **the Partnership should seek charitable status** - as a means of attracting financial and practical support (e.g. volunteering)
5. **along with coordinated, Trail-wide approaches to the development, management and marketing of the Trail, the Trail should be divided into 2 sections for operational purposes** - South: Chester to mid-Lancashire; North: mid-Lancashire to Carlisle
6. **a small Coastal Trail Development Group should be established** - comprising senior staff of key partner authorities and funding agencies and a representative of each Area Coordination Group, to provide technical advice and support to the Trail Partnership and staff and to guide and oversee operational aspects of Trail development, management, marketing and associated programmes
7. **more widely representative Area Coordination Groups (South; North) should be established** - to advise and support the Trail Officer and Trail Coordinators and ensure partnership cooperation and funding and progress on Trail programmes
8. **a Coastal Trail Coordination Unit should be established, comprising a Coastal Trail Officer, Trail Coordinators (South, North), a Funding and Marketing Officer and an Administrative Assistant** - to support the Partnership and 'drive' Trail development, management, marketing and associated programmes
9. **a Coastal Trail Consultative Forum(s) should be established** - as a means whereby interest groups can be consulted and can provide information, advice and suggestions on Trail development and related matters. This Forum (or area forums) may meet once or twice a year
10. **the Trail Partnership should encourage and support the formation of an independent North West Coastal Trail Friends Group** - to mobilise supporters of the Trail and encourage their involvement in its development, management and marketing.

Costs of running the proposed Partnership and Trail Coordination Unit are estimated at £190-207k/year. Initial establishment costs may amount to some £52-66k. These costs may be substantially reduced if partner organisations provide staff on a secondment, or similar, basis and/or provide support services and equipment as contributions in kind. Again, these costs should be considered against the potential benefits, which may be derived from the development of the North West Coast Discovery Trail and the associated social, environmental, recreational and tourism development programmes.