

AGENDA CLASSIFICATION OPEN		AGENDA ITEM 23	
REPORT TO	CABINET	DATE	16 OCTOBER 2003
FROM	DIRECTORATE: ENVIRONMENT DIVISION: PLANNING POLICY		
WARD	Bean & Darenth, Brent, Greenhithe, Heath, Joyce Green, Joydens Wood, Newtown, Princes, Stone, Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley, Swanscombe, Town and Wilmington		

SUBJECT: **PROJECT BIDS FOR ODPM SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES MONEY**

1. Details of Exempt Information Category

Not Applicable

2. Purpose of the Report and Summary.

The Deputy Prime Minister's Thames Gateway funding announcement on 30 July includes £4.5m for Regional Park, Green Grid and Sustainable Urban Design. North Kent authorities have been invited to submit project bids against this funding and the report identifies five projects and recommends that they are put forward.

3. Key Decision

The action/decision identified in paragraph 4 of this report is of significance in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area of the Borough comprising two or more wards.

4. RECOMMENDATION

That Members agree in principle that the five projects detailed at paragraph 6.3 be submitted as the Council's bids for Thames Gateway environmental projects funding and that the Managing Director and Director of Environment in consultation with the Leader and the Portfolio Member for Arts and Leisure be authorised to undertake any necessary action to progress and submit the bids.

5. Background

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5.1 In February 2003 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) published the Sustainable Communities Plan. As part of the Plan £446m was identified to support development in Thames Gateway.

5.2 At the end of July the Prime Minister announced how the £446m would be distributed across the Thames Gateway. Within North Kent, £4.5m has been set aside for three environmental projects; namely the Regional Park, Green Grid and Sustainable Urban Design, of which the majority of the funding will go towards Regional Park and Green Grid projects.

6. Discussion

6.1 North Kent authorities now have an opportunity to submit Regional Park and Green Grid projects, which can be substantially or completely implemented by the end of March 2006. The projects should benefit from or be capable of benefiting from match funding from other sources. Of the £4.5m available £0.5m has to be spent in the current financial year.

6.2 Kent County Council on behalf of the Thames Gateway Kent Partnership is co-ordinating bids. The ODPM will advise of the criteria that should be used to assess projects. This is awaited and at the time of writing there is no indication when this will be available. In view of the fact that monies need to be spent this financial year, it is likely that they will need to be prepared at short notice. Given the very restricted time scale, advance copies of the project pro forma have been sent to Kent County Council. Cabinet agreement to the bids is being sought now, to enable the Council to take advantage of the funding opportunity.

6.3 Five projects are described at paragraphs 6.4 to 6.18 below as the Council's potential bids for ODPM monies. The project bids themselves (which contain land ownership and financial information) are set out at Appendix 1. The projects are:

1. Swanscombe Heritage Park
2. Managing the Marshes
3. Ancient Woodlands Country Park
4. Dartford Heath
5. Enhancement of the Darent Valley.

These projects have been evolved by officers in liaison with other organisations, such as Groundwork Kent Thameside.

Swanscombe Heritage Park.

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- 6.4 The Heritage Park comprises about 75 hectares of land to the rear of the Swanscombe Centre, Craylands Lane, including Craylands Gorge and the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserve. The site is used by the community and has potential for greater use. The site is suffering from inappropriate uses which are causing damage. The greater the damage, the more the project will cost and with it the risk that the project will take longer to complete.
- 6.5 The Town and Borough Councils are working with Groundwork Kent Thameside, Kent County Council, Land Securities and the Kent Wildlife Trust to draw up a strategic plan for the area and implement the plan, as well as seeking funding. This is an important Kent Thameside Green Grid project.
- 6.6 The project is sufficiently advanced to be able to take full advantage of the ODPM monies.

Managing the Marshes

- 6.7 Dartford Marshes is a vulnerable urban fringe site. It is an area of nature conservation interest that will soon receive SSSI status. It is also an area that is suffering from inappropriate uses such as fly-tipping.
- 6.8 The “Managing the Marshes” project includes Dartford Marshes in Dartford Borough along with Crayford and Erith Marshes in the London Borough of Bexley. The project has been running since 1996. It is being run by Groundwork Kent Thameside and Groundwork Thames Gateway London South, supported by Dartford Borough, Bexley LB, Kent County Council, English Nature, the Environment Agency, the Kent Wildlife Trust and others.
- 6.9 The project covers 320 hectares in Dartford Borough. The project will aid the conservation and management of this valuable wetland habitat, as well as enabling greater public access and interpretation. This is an important Green Grid and Regional Park project.
- 6.10 The project is sufficiently advanced to be able to take full advantage of the ODPM monies.

Ancient Woodlands Country Park

- 6.11 There is an opportunity to create a country park of sub regional scale that builds upon the existing Darenth and Beacon Wood Country Parks. The provision of visitor and interpretation facilities at Darenth Country Park would help create a larger resource that could encourage longer visits and would promote natural heritage. There are opportunities to connect the park with the Kent Thameside Green Grid and provide links with existing and new communities. This is potentially an important Green Grid and Regional Park project.

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- 6.12 The future role of Stone Lodge is being considered by the Council and includes the provision of recreational and open space facilities. The site would form an important element of the Kent Thameside Green Grid. There may be opportunities in the medium to longer term to connect Stone Lodge with the wider country park to the south.
- 6.13 Project ideas will need to be worked up and sources of potential match funding will be sought.

Dartford Heath

- 6.14 Proposals to restore the heathland habitat and create a local nature reserve are being progressed by the Council with Groundwork Kent Thameside. Funding is being sought from a number of sources including DEFRA (Countryside Stewardship) and the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- 6.15 There is an opportunity to broaden the project to include improvements to the existing car parks, enhancing existing boundaries and barriers and providing disabled access to the heath.
- 6.16 The improvements will need to be worked up and sources of potential match funding will be sought.

Enhancement of the Darent Valley

- 6.17 The Darent Valley is a strategically important ecological and recreational route from the urban area of Dartford northwards to the River Thames and southwards towards Sevenoaks. The North West Kent Countryside Project established the Darent Valley footpath from Dartford town centre southwards over a decade ago. The footpath would benefit from enhancement, maintenance and management. An extension northwards from the town centre to the River Thames is proposed in the Local Plan Review. This would also connect into the Dartford Marshes.
- 6.18 The project ideas will need to be worked up and sources of potential match funding will be sought.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 The project details attached at Appendix 1 give an indication of likely costs and potential sources of funding.
- 7.2 The Swanscombe Heritage Park scheme indicates that this Council would be required to match fund £30,000. Although there is no specific budget for this, it could be charged to capital if approved. There is no current budget for the estimated £20,000 to £30,000 annual maintenance cost and both

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responsibility and cost would need to be reviewed. On the Managing the Marshes scheme the Council has budget provision for both the management and land purchase, as outlined in the project description. For the other projects identified the Council does not have any budget provision for either one-off match funding or any annual maintenance costs.

7.3 This is likely to be the only opportunity to bid for these funds. The Council could provide the necessary match funding identified for the Swanscombe Heritage Park and Managing the Marshes but has no budget for any additional on going maintenance costs and funding of this will need to be discussed with other partners. There is no specific budget for the other projects and if any of them were short listed, then the bids would need to be refined further and further consideration given to the match funding and any ongoing costs.

8. Legal Implications

None specifically.

9. Staffing and Other Administrative Implications

The projects identified will need to be progressed through the ODPM process, including working up full project details. This will have implications for staff resources.

10. Conclusion

Members are asked to agree the recommendation at section 4 of this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

<u>Short Title of Document</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>File Ref</u>	<u>Contact Officer</u>	<u>Exempt Information Category</u>
			Paul Buckley (ext 3202)	Not Appropriate

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Appendix 1: Project Bids Pro Formas

ODPM PROJECT BID: DARTFORD (GREEN GRID and REGIONAL PARK)

Project Title:	Swanscombe Heritage Park
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Landowner(s): Swanscombe & Greenhithe Town Council Lafarge

Delivery Agent: Groundwork Kent Thameside Swanscombe & Greenhithe Town Council

Site Area (m²): 75 ha approx

Existing Condition/Use:

Swanscombe Heritage Park is an area of open space with mixed uses and designations. It lies in the priority ward of Swanscombe and Greenhithe in close juxtaposition to sites of major existing and new regeneration in the Gateway. Thus Bluewater (to the west), Eastern Quarry (to the south) and Swanscombe Peninsula and Ingress Park (to the north) are all local to the site and are linked by it. The park contains extraordinary archaeological and paleoecological resources and is the site of the find of the oldest human cranium in northern Europe and part of the site is designated as a SSSI and NNR as a result. It was in fact the first geological SSSI in the country. Other sections of the site are designated as county wildlife sites and recent survey work has shown that it supports extraordinary assemblages of rare species. The whole site is used by the local community for informal recreation and whilst popular has suffered neglect and inappropriate uses for many years.

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Project Description :

- Draw up a strategic plan for the area based on ecology, geology and archaeology reports
- Remediate and landscape for community access and recreation, in the form of an urban park
- Preserve archaeological site and provide interpretation
- Area of Wildlife interest to be conserved and managed
- Eastern Quarry planning application for over 7,000 homes and up to 280,000m² of other floorspace: proposal for Craylands Gorge is to refurbish or replace the existing drainage pipes in the gorge. It is then proposed to construct a footpath along the gorge. The area is shown to be retained as an ecological/nature reserve area on the submitted plans accompanying the outline planning application.

Contribution to Green Grid Objectives:

Will contribute in the following ways

- Proposed park and footpath routes will provide strategic green grid open space and link between Eastern Quarry and Swanscombe Peninsula
- remediation and landscaping to form an urban park will provide major recreational amenity for Swanscombe and surrounding area
- nationally important palaeolithic site will be preserved, and interpretive facilities provided
- wildlife interest, mainly in the 'Gorge' will be maintained.

Spend Profile: £'000	2003/4				2004/5	2005/6
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
			30	30	210	100
Bid						
Other resources	5	5	30	55	125	125
Gross cost	5	5	60	85	335	225
Detail funding sources & commitment:					Total Cost: £715,000	
ODPM: Bid					£370,000	
DBC Project Fund					£30,000 over three years (annual bidding process)	
Groundwork					£20,000 over three years (annual bidding process)	
Community Enablers					£25,000 (Pilot bid)	
HLF development grant					£50,000 (in preparation)	
HLF Main Grant (Public Parks)					£220,000 (to be prepared post planning)	

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	grant stage, probably to a value of £1.2 mill over 5 years)
Estimated Net Annual Maintenance Cost:	£15,000 – 25,000. It is likely that organisations such as English Nature and Kent Register of International Geological Sites will be willing to contribute to some of the cost.

Proposed Procurement/Delivery Method:

Via Groundwork and Green Grid Project. Three consultants reports have been prepared: on ecology, geology and archaeology: to be fused into a strategy for the area via a project development grant from the HLF (bid in preparation) to include an audience development plan.

Business Plan being prepared.

Planning application submitted in August 2003 for erection of new fencing, lighting columns, interpretation and route marking signage, construction of new path and short diversion of another, creation of an entrance feature and three monuments to mark the location of the skull fragments in the National Nature Reserve.

Development Timescale:	
▪ Consultation/Design	06/03 to 05/04
▪ Contract & Works	06/04 to 06/08

Deliverability/Risk Assessment:

Requires consensus on design and implementation strategy, and secured funding for future maintenance via local authority sources or a specific charitable trust.

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ODPM PROJECT BID: DARTFORD (GREEN GRID and REGIONAL PARK)

Project Title:	Managing The Marshes: Dartford Marshes
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Landowner(s):

NHS (Secretary of State for Health), Hanson Aggregates, University of Greenwich, Environment Agency, P Duffield esq, B Thomsett esq, GlaxoSmithKline, Thames Water, Russell Stoneham Estates, S. Sergent esq
Darent Valley – Private ownership including Murex, SEEDA, GlaxoSmithKline, Rochester Trust

Delivery Agent: Groundwork Kent Thames-side

Site Area (m²):

Whole Marshes area: 320 ha

Existing Condition/Use:

Drained marshland in a variety of uses, mainly

- grazing
- disused, reverting to scrub
- gravel extraction
- clay pigeon shooting
- illegal motor cycle scrambling

Degraded urban fringe that suffers from fly-tipping. It is also a site of nature conservation interest, soon to have SSSI status. It is home to 240 species of bird, 140 of which are wetland species. The site has one of the highest recorded densities of water voles nationally as well as other rare animals such as the Harvest Mouse and Water Shrew. There also rare plants, aquatic invertebrates, snakes, lizards and amphibians. Scrub and secondary woodland on the site supports barn and long-eared owls.

Darent Valley/Dartford Creek – poor footpath cycle routes. Historic features but no interpretation. Industrial sites in need of enhancement.

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Project Description :

The project will provide for

- the management of a valuable wetland habitat – a site of nature conservation interest, soon to have SSSI status - with a high water vole population
- restoration of degraded areas
- interpretative facilities
- provide improved internal site access along with footpath/cycleway access and links to new and existing local communities
- The practical commencement of the project depends on land purchase from the NHS by DBC. For the purposes of this bid this will be assumed to have occurred by the 3rd quarter of 2003/04

Early wins (2003/04)

- Habitat restoration, access and heritage feature restoration on first part of site acquired
- Wider improvements to current footpath network along the Darent Valley/Dartford Creek linking to town centre and local populations.
- If site not acquired wider improvements (above) can continue.

Contribution to Green Grid Objectives:

Project will contribute in the following ways

- The conservation of valuable landscape associated with Inner Thames drained marshland
- The management of an important wildlife habitat for water voles and other threatened species
- The improvement of a degraded urban fringe area, and the removal of inappropriate uses
- The maintenance of a green belt strategic open gap between Dartford and Bexley
- An amenity and green backdrop for North Dartford Strategic Development site, also easily accessible to the Temple Hill area of Dartford
- A major expanse of Green Grid open space that connects with riverside footpath links (Darent and Thames) and local footpath links to new and existing centres of population.

Spend Profile: £'000	2003/4				2004/5	2005/6
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
Bid			30	70	250	250
Other resources	10	10	14	30	300	300
Gross cost	10	10	44	100	550	550

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Development Timescale:	
▪ Consultation/Design	08/03 to 03/04
▪ Contract & Works	04/04 to 03/07

Deliverability/Risk Assessment:

Implementation dependent on land acquisition: discussions currently underway between DBC, Secretary of State for Health (NHS) and ODPM. Darent Valley enhancement could include matched funding from Murex and possibly SEEDA.

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ODPM PROJECT BID: DARTFORD (GREEN GRID and REGIONAL PARK)

Project Title: Ancient Woodlands Country Park**Landowner(s):****Beacon Wood Country Park** Lafarge (Leased to KCC)**Darenth Country Park** Dartford Borough Council**Darenth Ancient Woodlands** Dartford Borough Council, Darenth Parish Council, Collier Ferguson Trust and private landowner.**Stone Lodge Area** Dartford Borough Council, Lafarge and Cleanaway.**Delivery Agent:****Beacon Woods Country Park** KCC and Dartford Borough Council**Darenth Country Park** Dartford Borough Council**Darenth Ancient Woodlands** A partnership between Dartford Borough Council, Darenth Parish Council, English Nature, Groundwork, Kent Wildlife Trust, etc.**Stone Lodge Area** A possible partnership between Dartford Borough Council and private developer.**Site Area (m²):** 900 ha (approx.)

Beacon Wood Country	88ha
Darenth Country Park:	90ha
Lords Wood:	90ha
Darenth Woods:	220ha
Arable:	280ha
Wider Stone Lodge area	103 ha

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Existing Condition/Use:

Beacon Wood Country Park – The 12 year old Country Park is under management by KCC (Owned by Land Securities). Excellent wildlife habitats and a long list of protected species. Need for access and interpretation plan to add on to existing Conservation Management System management plan. Need for access improvements and renovation of existing access features.

Darenth Country Park: A four year old park under management and ownership of DBC. Historic gardens in relict state. Includes the Arrow Riding Centre for the Disabled. Part of the park is leased to the school for grazing and disabled riding.

Stone Lodge

Land at Stone Lodge is used by the local community for informal recreation and suffers from fly-tipping, unauthorised encampments and off-road motor cycling. There is an indoor bowls facility on the site. Adjacent land is former landfill sites, which are still generating landfill gas and are used for grazing horses.

Darenth Ancient Woodlands

Between Darenth and Beacon Wood Country Parks lie large tracts of ancient woodlands and farmland. The woodlands are important ecologically. Lords, Ladies and Darenth woods are designated SSSI. The woodlands contain some of the most valuable of ancient semi-woodland in north-west Kent and include several rare woodland types. The wood was managed as coppice-with-stands, which gave rise to broadland woodland with areas of open heathland forming extensive glades. Changes in traditional practice resulted in much of the site lying unmanaged. Limited work has recently been undertaken by English Nature in Darenth Woods. There is an ancient monument in Darenth Woods north of the A2.

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Project Description :**Project description:**

The project provides the opportunity to lay the foundations for a country park of sub-regional scale building upon the existing Darenth and Beacon Wood Country Parks and the emerging Stone Lodge recreational facilities. The provision of waymarked trails for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians between the parks, improved links across the A2 and visitor facilities and interpretation centre at Darenth Country Park will help create a larger resource that could encourage longer visits. There are opportunities to link with the Kent Thameside Green Grid thus providing links with existing and new communities. The park could also incorporate sustainable management of the ancient woodlands.

Darenth Country Park

- The preparation of a management plan and access and tourism strategy to develop the role of the park as both a local and wider Kent Thameside resource.
- Improve site security
- Enhance facilities in the park through the provision of improved car parking, toilet facilities and visitor/interpretation centre – these will enable greater use and promotion of the wider park.
- There is an opportunity to develop a key local resource in the form of an ‘events field’ which could provide an income stream for on-going maintenance.
- Re-establish Nursery for propagating local providence trees

Stone Lodge

Landscaping provision to reinforce the Council’s ambition to secure a recreation focus on the site. This could include projects such as:

- Securing and landscaping the boundaries
- Creation of a high quality landscape setting
- Laying out new areas of open space

Darenth Ancient Woodlands

- The provision of waymarked trails for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians between the parks
- Restore the historic extent of Darenth Woods for public access and include innovative examples of sustainable activities such as energy forestry
- Undertake extensive habitat restoration/management
- Community woodland

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Contribution to Regional Park Objectives:

Project will contribute in the following ways

- A mix of recreational facilities from formal to informal.
- An expanded and enhanced network of country parks linking into the existing network and into new provision including the major new recreation provision at Stone Lodge The proposed park straddles the urban fringe linking the surrounding countryside in the heart of Kent Thames-side. It will be highly assessable to existing and new communities and provide links between them.
- Social and economic regeneration addressed through links to priority communities, new training opportunities, activities for excluded groups
- Promotes sustainability agenda in that proposed elements will be income generating and thus help to sustain this part of the regional park.
- Increased area of long term irreplaceable ecological resources.
- Major new community forest planted with locally grown local stock trees providing local employment.
- SSSI quality habitats managed at favourable conservation status.
- Employment opportunities in on-site facilities.
- Energy forestry/green technologies demonstrated by full working examples.

Spend Profile: £'000	2003/4				2004/5	2005/6
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
Bid	7.5	25	125	125	500	500
Other resources (public committed on-going site maintenance at Darenth and Beacon Wood)				34	40	40
Other resources non-committed	7.5	25	125	91	1460	1460
Gross cost	15 (rev)	50 (rev)	250	250	2000	2000
Detail funding sources & commitment:	2003/04 contribution includes existing management contribution to Beacon Wood Country Park, Darenth Country Park. Capital works to be identified and implemented at Darenth Country Park and Beacon Wood in 2003/04 financial year. Feasibility studies needed on large scale physical works. HLF funding to be sought in next 6					

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	<p>months post scoping study funded via ODPM.</p> <p>English Nature Groundwork Darenth Parish Council Bean Parish Council Existing Landowners</p> <p>Key milestone to set up partnership to take project forward.</p>
Estimated Net Annual Maintenance Cost:	£175,000 for fully completed scheme. It is possible that other organisations and bodies may be willing to contribute towards the cost of maintenance, for example English Nature in connection with Darenth Woods.

Proposed Procurement/Delivery Method:**Darenth Ancient Woodlands**

- Partnership comprising all the organisations listed above will provide guidance via a steering group to a chosen project manager drawn from the partnership.
- Vision to be drawn up with clear objectives and targets.
- All site management plans will follow the Conservation Management System format and be delivered by a range of delivery agents drawn from the partnership and other organisations.
- A separate audit and review process will check the development of the area against targets as set in the plans and strategies. Land may require to be purchased via CPO and remain with the local authority or charitable organisations (existing or created for the purpose).

Stone Lodge

- Partnership to develop and manage wildlife area
- Creation of open space
- Secure enhance site boundaries
- Landscape boundaries

Darenth Country Park

- Reconvened Advisory Group

Beacon Wood Country Park

- Advisory Group

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Development Timescale:	05/03 to 03/04
▪ Consultation/Design	
▪ Tender	09/03 to 04/04
▪ Construction	10/03 to 03/06
▪ Completion	2013

Deliverability/Risk Assessment:**Quick wins (over next 3 years)**

- Establish key waymarked trail linking Beacon Wood Country Park with Darenth Country Park
- Improve, secure and waymark existing footpaths linking trail with existing communities
- Complete management plan for Darenth Country Park.
- Undertake feasibility study for extending Darenth Ancient Woodland.
- Undertake review of sustainable energy activities appropriate to the location.

Longer Term (over next 6 years)

- There may be need to acquire sites to incorporate into Country Parks
- Undertake new access and enhancement works to new areas
- Provide enhanced interpretation facilities at Darenth Country Park. (Subject to feasibility study/specification)
- Refurbish cottage (Revisit feasibility study and specifications).

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ODPM PROJECT BID: DARTFORD (GREEN GRID and REGIONAL PARK)

Project Title:	Dartford Heath
Landowner(s): Dartford Council	
Delivery Agent: Groundwork Kent Thameside Dartford Council	
Site Area (m²): 140 ha approx	
Existing Condition/Use: Dartford Heath is an important area of open space to the south western side of Dartford. It is an area of degraded lowland heath which whilst used by the local community for informal recreation suffers from fly-tipping, unauthorised encampments and off-road motor cycling.	
Project Description : Proposals to restore the heathland habitat and create a local nature reserve are being progressed by the Council with Groundwork Kent Thameside. A project is being prepared to restore the heathland habitat and create a local nature reserve. The establishment of the Heath Protection Group is seen as a catalyst to local resident involvement in the site and retaking the site for the local community. There is the opportunity to broaden the project to include improvements to the existing car parks, enhancing existing boundaries and barriers and providing disabled access to the Heath. This project bid is for the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving site security and improving the appearance of existing security bunding - Improving the outer appearance of the site along main routes into the town such as from the A2 - Improvements to existing car parks - Removal of lay bys; 	

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Contribution to Green Grid Objectives:

The removal of inappropriate uses, and restoration and management of valuable heathland
 Enhances the local environment of Kent Thames Gateway and a gateway feature on the main route from Kent to London
 Gives exiting and new communities improved access to enhanced, well managed open space.

Spend Profile: £'000	2003/4				2004/5	2005/6
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
Bid					15	15
Other resources					25	25
Gross cost					40	40
Detail funding sources & commitment: ODPM: Bid					£30,000 There may be an opportunity to use funding obtained for the restoration and management of the Heath as match funding.	
Estimated Net Annual Maintenance Cost:					£12,000 – 22,000 (relates to the whole of the Heath). The ODPM bid works are likely to result in limited maintenance costs eg car parks.	

Proposed Procurement/Delivery Method:

Delivery by Groundwork Kent Thames-side in conjunction with Dartford Council, other partners and the local community.

Development Timescale:

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▪ Consultation/Design	06/03 to 03/04
▪ Contract & Works	06/04 to 06/06

Deliverability/Risk Assessment:

Requires secured funding for ODPM project bid. The wider heath project requires consensus on design and implementation strategy, and secured funding for future maintenance via local authority sources or a specific charitable trust.

Quick Wins (over next 3 years):

- Improve existing car parks
- Improve site security and enhance the appearance of existing security bunding

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ODPM PROJECT BID: DARTFORD (GREEN GRID and REGIONAL PARK)

<p>Project Title: Enhancement of the Darent Valley</p>
<p>Landowner(s): Mixture of private and public bodies</p>
<p>Delivery Agent: Dartford Council, Environment Agency, Groundwork Kent Thames-side, North West Kent Countryside Project and a range of other partners.</p>
<p>Site Area (m²): Approx 6km²</p>
<p>Existing Condition/Use: The Darent Valley is a strategically important ecological and recreational route from the urban area of Dartford northwards to the Thames and south. The Darent Valley consists of several character areas: <i>North of Dartford Town Centre</i> Please refer to Managing the Marshes project profile. <i>Within Dartford Town Centre</i> Canalised river with public access routes in poor condition. River itself is subject to dumping and neglect with existing developments preventing visual and physical access. Historic features neglected and uninterpreted. <i>South of Dartford Town Centre</i> River passes through Dartford's Central Park and privately owned land. To the south it passes into more open areas of the urban fringe and wider countryside. Routes here have been established but not maintained. Historic features uninterpreted and poorly maintained. Waymarking requires improvement.</p>
<p>Project Description :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance the appearance of the river and its valley by improving the river bank, improving public access, including disabled access, and footpaths and providing interpretation and improved waymarking. Forging links to other key green grid and regional park projects as well as existing recreation and country park provision.

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Contribution to Green Grid Objectives:

Project will contribute in the following ways

- Enhanced green link between the town centre south to the Regional Park and north to the North Dartford marshes.
- Improved footpaths and cycle ways linked to health initiatives in adjoining priority communities.
- Opportunities for involving local businesses, local communities and private sector partners.
- Employment opportunities from capital works and ongoing management and maintenance and new enterprises such as cycle hire.
- New opportunities for education and other activities to increase use of the area.

Spend Profile: £'000	2003/4				2004/5	20053/6
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
Bid				10	40	50
Other resources			20	40	160	150
Gross cost			20	50	200	200
Detail funding sources & commitment:	Possible private sector investment north of Dartford Town Centre (Murex and SEEDA) Likely interest from the Environment Agency. HLF funding to be sought in next 6 months. Other contributors (cash and in kind) may include the Environment Agency, Local Business, English Nature and Parish Councils. Discussions/Partnership to be established. Early estimates suggest project requires in the order of £470,000 to complete. £100,000 would upgrade and improve existing features prior to major enhancement works.					
Estimated Net Annual Maintenance Cost:	£38,000. The Environment Agency will contribute towards the maintenance of the river. The net cost of maintaining the footpath and Powdermills site is likely to be in the region of £10,000.					

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Proposed Procurement/Delivery Method:

- Groundwork Kent Thames-side and other partners.

Development Timescale:	
Town Centre	Depends on Town Centre development initiatives
▪ Consultation/Design	
▪ Tender	
▪ Construction	
▪ Completion	
South of Town Centre	
▪ Consultation/Design/initial infrastructure work	Q3 2003/2004
▪ Tender	Q1 2004/2005
▪ Construction	Q3 2004/2005 to 2006/2007
▪ Completion	04/2007

Deliverability/Risk Assessment:

Quick wins (over next 3 years)

- Improve surfaces, signs, interpretation to existing public routes
- Enhance the river banks.