

Appendix A – Review of Community Match

Community Match Review

Background

Community Match was launched in 2014 and provided a framework under which officers have worked with communities to take forward their locally important small scale transport improvements that were not of sufficient priority to be delivered using County Council funding alone.

Communities commit to take ownership of their scheme, carry out local consultation to demonstrate support for the scheme and provide at least 50% of the scheme costs. The County Council has then match funded the remainder of the costs, and worked together with the community to design and construct the scheme. Since its inception over £250,000 of capital funding has been allocated to take these schemes forward.

Review of Community Match

Whilst Community Match has successfully delivered a wide range of local transport improvements that have made a real difference to communities which otherwise would not have been taken forward, the delivery of some of these schemes has not always been a smooth process and a number of issues have arisen. Taking the opportunity of the award of the new Highways Contract to the Costain and its partnership with Joint Venture company Jacobs (formally CH2M), the operation of Community Match was thoroughly reviewed to learn lessons and improve the offer to communities.

As a result, there were a number of changes proposed to the way Community Match operates. The County Council retains approval of schemes and the allocation of match funding, but responsibility for delivering Community Match is carried out by Costain and Jacobs and been incorporated into their Social Value offering.

Feasibility of Schemes

A new feasibility study stage was introduced in 2016, whereby communities can commission Costain and Jacobs to undertake a feasibility study for their schemes. A feasibility study can be requested at any time by communities and will cost in the region of £500-£1000. This includes a site visit and meeting with the community group by an engineer who will assess the merits and feasibility of the scheme based on current highway and traffic, highway boundaries, safety implications and logistics of request, as well as giving an indicative cost for the design and construction of the project.

It is recommended that prior to submitting a Community Match application communities should commission a feasibility study to take their concept to a defined scheme. This may need to include the community commissioning speed surveys and gathering crash data and other information necessary to define their scheme.

Aiming to help communities take forward their locally important schemes, often only very limited feasibility design work had been carried out before the community made an application and a broad concept rather than an actual defined scheme was progressed through the application process. Sometimes significant issues that had an effect on the scope of the scheme and its timescale for delivery and cost did not come to light until much later on in the delivery process.

To alleviate these problems Community Match required a mechanism whereby more formal early feasibility design work could be carried out before a community makes an application for match funding. This ensures that schemes are actually feasible, as well as identifying the necessary scope of the scheme and providing communities better information about the likely cost of their scheme, for them to determine if it is affordable and deliverable. For schemes that are then subsequently taken forward this also helps identify potential issues early on when they can be more easily resolved during the design process, reducing the likelihood of time delays and cost increases later on during construction.

Lessons Learnt

Several issues have occurred frequently with schemes that have been delivered through Community Match, and they can be summarised into several main categories, discussed below:

➤ **Aims and Objectives**

Several applications were received from communities keen to have “something” done, but often what they were asking for did not refer to an identified problem they were trying to resolve.

We need to ensure that limited resources are directed to schemes that deliver clear benefits and this should apply equally to schemes that are jointly funded by the local community. To ensure that this is the case, when making an application, communities should clearly identify what the problem or issue is that they are trying to address, and the benefits that their scheme will deliver. The problem should be backed up by evidence such as speed data or crash records. A review of the application form and information held on the website has been carried out to ensure Parishes are better informed.

➤ **Public Consultation, Support and Opposition to schemes**

There have been several instances when significant opposition has been encountered to schemes, often late on in the delivery process and even though the scheme was reported to be supported by the local community.

It is recommended that following their feasibility study communities should carry out a local consultation with their residents and other stakeholders. The responses from the consultation should then be considered by the relevant Parish Council or organisation in deciding whether or not to proceed with making a Community Match application. Communities need to more clearly demonstrate that their schemes have local support and that any opposition to their schemes has been considered.

➤ **Traffic Regulation Orders**

Several schemes have been taken forward that have required TRO's such as parking restrictions and speed limits. In a number of cases, objections have been received to the TRO when it has been advertised. Whilst objections can be considered by Planning Committee, often these schemes do not have evidence to counter the objections, leaving the scheme in a precarious position and potentially then with abortive work and costs should it not proceed to construction. By focussing on the evidence to identify the problem and also carrying out greater early consultation, these issues could be reduced; however there will always remain the chance that objections will be received to TRO's.

➤ **Costs and Timescales**

Communities have been surprised at the length of time it takes to deliver schemes and the processes involved. The cost of schemes has also caused surprise. Cost rises due to changes either as part of the design process, or during construction on site have also caused issues.

As part of the feasibility study, outline cost information is given, which will allow communities to determine if their scheme is affordable at an earlier stage and avoid abortive design costs if they are not in a position to find the necessary funds.

It is also proposed that once a scheme is approved for design and construction, the work will then be carried out on a fixed fee basis, rather than the current share of outturn costs. This will give communities greater cost certainty.