

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE : 5 FEBRUARY 2002

CUMNOCK AREA SCHOOLS ENVIRONMENT PROJECT

Report by Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1** To advise Elected Members of a proposed environmental project involving pupils and teachers in schools in the Cumnock and surrounding areas.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The rural areas of East Ayrshire are home to important populations of wildlife, including animals, and birds. It is a feature of modern life that these groups of wildlife face a variety of threats. The biggest of these is where the input of man induces, pollutes or destroys their habitat or access to food. At the same time East Ayrshire has many pockets of social disadvantage where the economic, and therefore the general life, of the human population is threatened. Where the economic life is threatened there is invariably pressure on the natural environment that supports wildlife.
- 2.2** This very challenge of conflict, however, provides an important opportunity. By using the environment of East Ayrshire a natural educational resource is created to be used to nurture responsible environmental attitudes in our young people. This can be enhanced through increasing knowledge and understanding of the environment and cultural heritage. In turn this could lead to the use of problem-solving approaches designed to tackle the difficulties and challenges posed by man and his environment.
- 2.3** Funding has been secured for a joint project between East Ayrshire Council Educational and Social Services Department, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage. The major activity will be to work with teachers in the target area to increase both the amount and the quality of teaching and learning about the natural and cultural heritage of their area.

3. PROJECT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 3.1** The proposed project aims to develop in young people in the Cumnock area an understanding of their natural and cultural environment. This will be achieved by increasing both the quality of teaching and learning carried out within target schools. An important impact of the project is to stimulate in young people positive attitudes to the environment so that they will seek to enhance it.
- 3.2** Opportunities will be provided to:

- increase pupils' first hand experience of the natural and cultural environment.
- increase pupils' understanding of the natural and cultural features that make East Ayrshire, and the project area, distinctive.
- increase pupils' understanding of the activities and processes which can enhance or threaten the local environment.
- increase pupils' involvement with local communities.
- increase pupils' understanding of sustainable development and biodiversity, in local and global contexts.
- develop pupils' skills, in particular critical thinking and problem solving, using the local environment as a context.
- develop local case studies of issues concerned with biodiversity and sustainable development, including,
 - cultural history
 - local wildlife conservation
 - land use and land management
 - waste
- produce materials and teaching guidelines for increasing pupils' understanding of the positive and negative aspects of open cast mining.

4. PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

The project will operate in schools bordering on the North Lowther and Muirkirk Uplands Special Protection Area. These are:

Cumnock Academy

Barshare Primary School
 Cairnhill Primary School
 Castle Primary School
 Greenmill Primary School
 Logan Primary School
 Netherthird Primary School

St Joseph's Academy (Cumnock Campus)

St John's (Cumnock) Primary School
 St Patrick's (Auchinleck) Primary School

Muirkirk Primary School
 Sorn Primary School

5. SUPPORT TO SCHOOLS

- 5.1** A project officer will provide assistance by working with teachers, including co-operative teaching. New teaching ideas will be developed and piloted. These will then be made available to staff.

When appropriate, the project officer will directly support practical approaches to environmental education.

5.2 Sharing good practice is a vital role for the project officer. By working in all the schools in the target area on a specific range of topics, the project officer will be able to network methods, materials and ideas.

5.3 Training will be the most formal means of working with teachers. When an issue for relevance to a number of teachers has been identified, a formal training course will be provided, within the schools' and the Council's normal training arrangements.

6. POLICY/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Nil

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

All costs associated with the project will be met by RSPB Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund. A base will be provided in St Patrick's Primary School for the Project Officer.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members of the Education Committee:

- i) commend the involvement of schools in the Cumnock Area Environment Project.
- ii) otherwise note the content of this report.

John Mulgrew
Director of Educational and Social Services

KMcK/MR
8 January 2002

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil

Members wishing further information should contact Graham Short, Head of Schools, Tel: (01563) 576192 or Kenneth McKinlay, Principal, Quality Development, Tel : (01563) 555650

IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER : GRAHAM SHORT

AGENDA