

<b>REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE</b>		Report No. 10
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	24 <sup>th</sup> July 2008	
<b>Title of Report</b>	Environmental Grants	
<b>Portfolio</b>	Leisure and Economy	
Link to Corporate Priorities	Spatial Planning, Buoyant Economy & Healthy Lifestyles	
Key Decision	Yes	
Executive Workplan Ref	B399	
Public Report	Yes	

<p><b>Summary of Report</b></p> <p>This report recommends payment of grants from the Environmental Grants budget for 2008/09.</p>
<p><b>Officer Recommendations</b></p> <p><b>To approve Option 1: Payment of grant to organisations as detailed in paragraph 5.2 of the report.</b></p>

Other than those implications agreed with the relevant Officers and referred to below, there are no other implications associated with this report.				
Financial Implications	Legal Implications	Community & Environmental Implications	Human Resources Implications	Equality & Diversity Implications
Yes	None	Yes	None	None

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Council has for many years offered grants to enable organisations to undertake projects with far reaching environmental benefits, ranging from landscape scale improvements, to smaller projects such as hedgerow restoration and tree planting within the District.
- 1.2 Applicants must show that they are addressing the issues set out in the approved grant criteria and must contribute to the aims of the Countryside and Open Space Strategy.
- 1.3 The budget for this financial year is £33,680.

## 2. Options and Options Appraisal

- 2.1 **Option 1:** The Executive approves payment of grant as detailed in paragraph 5.2.
- 2.2 **Option 2:** The Executive re-apportion the amounts given to organisations. This would likely give rise to financial difficulty to those affected by any reduction of grant.

## 3. Committed Funds

- 3.1 The Council has a statutory duty under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 to support the management of any Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in their areas. In North Wiltshire there are two AONB's – the Cotswolds AONB and the North Wessex Downs AONB. This mandatory obligation is best met by making a financial contribution from the Environmental Grants budget to the AONB bodies (see **Appendix 1** for an explanation of these), the amount of which is formula based, determined by the extent of the AONB within North Wiltshire.
- 3.2 Late in the last financial year (2007/2008) the North Wessex Downs AONB came to the council with a request for further funding of £1,000 on top of that already given through the environmental grants process to meet a funding shortfall. This money was given and the environmental grants budget increased by £1,000 for subsequent years. However, the North Wessex Downs AONB have submitted a request for further increase in the grant of £1600 as match funding towards a Leader bid. Whilst the Council is supportive there are not enough funds available in this budget to fully meet the needs of the AONB without impacting on other organisations. A compromise is to meet somewhere in the middle and this is detailed in Table 5.2.
- 3.3 Under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 the Council has a duty to have regard to biodiversity in all of its undertakings, whilst there is also a raft of wildlife legislation aimed at protecting habitats and species. To enable decisions to be made up to date information is required and much of this information is gathered and managed, respectively, by the Wildlife Sites and Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre (BRC). Local Planning authorities are the biggest user of the service provided and all authorities in Wiltshire contribute to the running of these two projects under a service level agreement. Both the Wildlife Sites Project and the BRC are hosted by the Wildlife Trust.
- 3.4 A contribution is also made from this budget to support the work of the Great Western Community Forest (GWCF). The GWCF is one of twelve Community Forests set up in the country in 1988. The Forest programme is the largest environmental initiative under way in the UK, reaching half of the population and being shaped by local

people. The GWCF is a key countryside partner as detailed in the Countryside and Open Space Strategy.

#### 4. Other Organisations

- 4.1 As well as the organisations detailed in 3.1 to 3.4 above, there are other organisations that the Council has supported for many years, allowing them to work on project that contribute to the aims of the Council's Countryside and Open Space Strategy. These are the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust for its Rebuilding Biodiversity Project, BTCV, the Cotswold Canal Trust, and the Wilts and Berks Canal Trust. Further information on these organisations is given in **Appendix 1**.

#### 5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 The available budget for 2008/09 is £33,680, a rise of £1040 from the previous financial year.
- 5.2 Table 5.2 below summarises the amount of grant requested and the proposed grant distribution for this year, along with the grant awarded in the previous two years.

**Table 5.2: Grant budget summary**

Name of organisation	Grant 2006/07	Grant 2007/08	Grant Requested 2008/09	Recommended Grant 2008/09
Cotswolds AONB	£6,991	£7,201	£7,417	£7,417
N. Wessex Downs AONB	£3,568	£4,675	£6,847	£4,900
Wiltshire Wildlife Trust	£14,392	£9,894 <sup>1</sup>	£10,000 <sup>1</sup>	£10,000 <sup>1</sup>
Wiltshire & Swindon Biological Records Centre	-	£4,500	£4,613	£4,613
Great Western Community Forest	£4,000	£4,000	£4,000	£4,000
Cotswold Canal Trust	£550	£550	£550	£550
Wilts & Berks Canal Trust	£1,500	£1,500	£1,500	£1,500
BTCV	£699	£700	£700	£700
<b>Total</b>	<b>£31,700</b>	<b>£32,020</b>	<b>£35,5627</b>	<b>£33,680</b>

<sup>1</sup> This figure is for two projects - the Wildlife Sites Project and the Rebuilding Biodiversity Project, as well as Corporate Membership to the Trust.

## 6. Community and Environment Implications

- 6.1 The growing concern over the impacts of global warming means that supporting environmental projects is even more relevant and important. The aims of the applicants include measures that not only mitigate against adverse effects but also bring many community benefits. It is well known, for example, that there are health benefits associated with regular contact with spaces that are rich in wildlife.

## 7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1 Risks will be minimised by following the recommended option. This will ensure that the Council is able to meet its statutory obligations relating to the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the provision of environmental information essential for planning purposes. It will also reduce the financial risk to applicants who have received support for many years and include the grant in their annual budgets.

<b>Appendices:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Appendix 1 – Summary of Organisations</b></li></ul>
<b>Background Documents Used in the Preparation of this Report:</b>	

### Previous Decisions Connected with this Report

<b>Report</b>	<b>Committee &amp; Date</b>	<b>Minute Reference</b>
Countryside and Open Space Strategy and Play Strategy	Executive 19 <sup>th</sup> April 2007	E227
Environmental Grants	Executive 27 <sup>th</sup> May 2004	E18

## Synopsis of Organisations

### Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Natural England is responsible for designating AONBs (under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1947) and advising Government and others on how they should be protected and managed. Areas are designated solely for their landscape qualities for the purpose of conserving and enhancing their natural beauty (which includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries).

There are now 41 AONB's in England and Wales (the designation does not cover Scotland or Northern Ireland) with two partly in North Wiltshire

#### Cotswolds AONB

The Cotswolds AONB was designated in 1966 and is the largest AONB in the country covering some 790 square miles; approximately 18% of North Wiltshire (47 square miles) is within the AONB. Following the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, the Cotswolds AONB Partnership decided to take-up the option of becoming a Board which can have significant powers including those of a planning authority (although the Board has chosen not to use this option). All local authorities within the AONB area contribute funding and also appoint a member of the Board, although that person does not represent the authority.

#### North Wessex Downs AONB

The North Wessex Downs AONB was designated in 1972 and covers a small area (7%) of the eastern edge of the District including Yatesbury, Cherhill and much of Compton Bassett. The AONB is governed by a Council of Partners (with an Executive Committee) and the Council has membership at Member and Officer level, although with just one vote.

### **BTCV**

The charity was set up in 1959, and has a successful history of environmental conservation volunteering throughout the UK and around the world. BTCV works with corporate partners, the Government, Big Lottery Fund, local authorities, government agencies such as English Nature and individual donors.

BTCV's vision is *A better environment where people are valued, included and involved* and it's key values are:

- Sustained environmental improvement: A healthy environment and improved biodiversity is at the heart of all BTCV's activities
- Inclusiveness, accessibility and choice: BTCV is sensitive to people's needs, their environmental awareness, personal values and beliefs, and is striving to be accessible to all
- Appropriate support: BTCV understands that individuals and local communities require different types of support
- Individual and community empowerment: BTCV inspires people to fulfil their potential
- Corporate responsibility: BTCV provides a safe, healthy working environment for our staff and volunteers, with development opportunities to meet their personal aspirations

### **Cotswold Canal Trust**

Aims - The Cotswold Canal Trust, a registered charity founded in 1972. Its aims are:

- To promote for the benefit of the community, the reopening of the Cotswold Canals;

- To promote the restoration of the two waterways to give a balance between the needs of navigation, development, recreation, heritage, landscape conservation, wildlife and natural habitats;
- To promote the use of the towpath as the Thames and Severn Way long distance footpath;
- To achieve the restoration of the Cotswold Canals as a navigable route from Saul Junction to the River Thames.

### **Great Western Community Forest**

The Great Western Community Forest (GWCF) is one of England's 12 Community Forests where local people and organisations are working together to create a better environment. It covers an area of 168 square miles stretching from Wootton Bassett to Faringdon and the North Wessex Downs to the Thames.

The project is an exciting partnership between a wide range of local and regional organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors which work together to deliver a comprehensive package of urban, economic and social regeneration. A dedicated Community Forest Team ensures that the Forest is developing on the ground over the next twenty-five years.

GWCF is creating high-quality environments for local people by diversifying land-use, revitalising derelict landscapes, enhancing biodiversity and providing new opportunities for leisure, recreation, cultural activity, education, healthy living and social and economic development. GWCF plays a crucial role in contributing to sustainable development in Swindon, the urban fringes and in the varied and beautiful surrounding countryside.

The Community Forest works closely with local people and enjoys strong community support. Our project activities provide local communities with many occasions to make decisions regarding improvements in their neighbourhood and to take ownership of their environment.

### **Wilts and Berks Canal Trust**

The aim of the Trust is: *To protect, conserve and improve the route of the Wilts & Berks and North Wilts Canals, and branches, for the benefit of the community and environment, with the ultimate goal of restoring a continuous navigable waterway linking the Kennett & Avon at or near Melksham, the River Thames at or near Abingdon, and the Thames and Severn Canal at or near Cricklade.*

And has the following objectives:

1. Convince local authorities, government departments and local organisations of the benefits and feasibility of the proposed restoration.
2. Convince landowners, local commerce and the general public of the merits of restoration.
3. Secure the route of the waterway and adequate water supplies.
4. Establish the Trust as a key member of a partnership with local authorities and other bodies that will facilitate restoration of the canal.
5. Implement an agreed programme for full restoration of the canal.

Currently the Trust is heavily involved with the Cricklade Country Way lottery bid.

### **Wiltshire Wildlife Trust**

The aim of the Trust is a sustainable future for wildlife and people. It is the largest wildlife charity in the county; through projects the Trust undertakes:

- Surveying, monitoring and protection of County Wildlife Sites;
- Implementation of Biodiversity Action Plan priorities and targets;
- Protection of natural heritage within the wider countryside,
- Influencing land management and developing access,
- Supporting communities;

The Council supports two Trust projects, the Landscapes for Wildlife Project and the Wildlife Trust Project.

### The Landscapes for Wildlife Project

The Landscapes for Wildlife Project aims to expand and link together scattered areas of land that is rich in wildlife in the ancient royal hunting Forest of Braydon in North Wiltshire. This is part of the vision of sustainably rebuilding the landscape into one that is vibrant with wildlife. Covering nearly eight thousand hectares of land, the project is taking a targeted approach to restoring and recreating habitats, so that wildlife will be more able to survive the changes and uncertainties that it could face in the future. Broadleaved woodland, as well as hay meadows and pastures, are the main focus for the project, but ponds and hedges are also important habitats for wildlife that make up the landscape of this area. Using a carefully prepared methodology developed by the South West Wildlife Trusts, Strategic Nature Areas have been identified within the project boundary within which a concentration of effort will bring most wildlife gain.

### The Wildlife Sites Project

County Wildlife Sites are areas of land of recognised importance for wildlife, which fall outside the legal protection of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) system. To date the Trust has identified around 1500 such sites, with a total area comparable to that of the SSSI's in Wiltshire. These form a vital network of threatened habitats such as ancient woodlands, hay meadows, wetlands and chalk grasslands, providing space for many of the county's declining animal and plant species. The Wildlife Sites Project aims to:

- Identify all the important sites for wildlife in the county and survey each of them every few years.
- Develop a working relationship with the owners and managers of all Wildlife Sites, providing information about the importance of their sites for wildlife.
- Encourage management that will conserve and enhance the value of sites for wildlife and offer advice and assistance with obtaining grant-aid for such management.
- Work alongside other bodies to attempt to halt the decline in wildlife habitats and to enhance wild spaces in the wider countryside.

### **The Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre**

The Wiltshire & Swindon Biological Records Centre (WSBRC) provides a central reference point for environmental information on geology, habitats, sites and species in the County of Wiltshire and the Borough of Swindon. A small team of staff and volunteers ensure that environmental records collected by a wide range of different organisations and individuals are brought together in one place, checked and processed to provide an overall picture of the county's natural environment. This information, is then used to monitor the changing status and distribution of both habitats and species. This information is used to ensure that important areas for wildlife are taken into account when considering plans for new developments and that environmental organisations are able to target their resources more effectively.

The BRC undertake a planning screen function, which is a statutory requirement for planning applications, on behalf of the Council. Without this service the Council would have to find an alternative 'supplier', which undoubtedly would increase the cost of that service considerably.