

**Wiltshire Council**

**Full Council**

**17 May 2022**

**Item 15 – Members’ Questions**

**From Cllr Bridget Wayman, Nadder Valley**

**To Councillor Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Climate Change, MCI, Economic Development, Heritage, Arts, Tourism and Health & Wellbeing**

**Statement**

Wiltshire Council and the other Councils with the Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty match fund the Defra contribution of core funding to the AONB (as it does to North Wessex Downs and Cotswolds AONBs).

The Glover Review proposed that there should be a doubling of AONB grants from Defra because there is such a disparity in funding between National Parks and AONBs, despite them having the same ‘great weight’ afforded to their landscape importance.

Unfortunately, Defra have announced only a small additional grant for 22/23 which is likely to remain at that level for 23/24 and 24/25. In the case of the Cranborne Chase AONB the Defra increase is £32,750.52. Defra is expecting the additional grant allocation to be added to the core funding element of the AONB budget, but for that to be possible the additional grant needs to be matched by the constituent local authority contributions which, in Wiltshire Council’s case would be £6,700.76.

I have asked the Leader to increase Wiltshire’s contribution by the £6,700.76. Although I am not aware of the amounts that would also be required to match fund the additional Defra grant to the other two AONBs, I know that the Cranborne Chase AONB forms the largest contribution by Wiltshire Council and would anticipate that the total additional contributions to all three AONBs would be considerably less than £10,000.

The Leader has responded that budgets are incredibly tight this year as inflationary increases are higher than budgeted, so any increase to core budget funding for AONBs is unlikely.

I understand that a new procurement exercise for the supply of electricity to Council premises has recently been completed and a premium of £75,000 for green energy is to be paid. If Wiltshire Council did not pay that premium a saving of £75,000 could

be made and the additional funding to the AONBs would be easily affordable and the difference could be used to offset other Council financial pressures.

From the work that our AONBs undertake across a very large part of Wiltshire's land mass in increasing biodiversity and restoring nature, amongst other things, the benefits of the additional funding to their core budgets would be of far greater benefit than a green premium on our electricity bill.

**Question (22-09)**

Would the Leader please commit to fund the additional small sums required to match Defra's funding for the AONBs in Wiltshire?

**Response:**

Defra notified Wiltshire Council that Ministers had approved the protected landscapes grant settlement for 2022-23 in mid-March, after Council budgets had been approved. The national AONB budget has been increased by an additional £1million per year for the next three years (years 2 and 3 being indicative). This represents a 14.7% increase on the 2021/22 budget (excluding in-year top ups). In addition, individual AONB's have annual Farming in Protected Landscapes awards which for Cranbourne Chase is £453,974 for 22/23. The additional Defra funding allocated can be either used for core costs or for projects, subject to match funding, and so will not be lost.

The council's utilities budget is separate from AONB funding. The uplift for the council's green tariff in 2022/23 is about 1.28% of our estimated £5.9m electricity bill. The green tariff helps the council to meet its climate strategy commitments, encouraging the supply of renewable energy and ensuring that our electricity is zero carbon.