

**Review of North Wiltshire District Council's
Partnership with
Wiltshire Wildlife Trust**

March 2006

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Introduction

This document forms the report of the review of Wiltshire Wildlife Trust (WWT) as key partner of North Wiltshire District Council. North Wiltshire District Council sees the importance of working in partnership with the local community and has outlined partnership working as a corporate priority.

“Everything to be underpinned by partnership working and community engagement, working towards building true community spirit and a caring society.”
NWDC Corporate plan 2005

1. Background & Overview to the Review

1.1 In a recent CPA inspection the Council was recognised as being a “good partner” to work with, but highlighted areas where the Council needed to improve in order to ensure that partnership working delivers value for money. To better understand these issues and to address them the Council and the Audit Commission have undertaken a joint review of the Council's approach to partnership working. The review sought to gain opinion from partners, to look into the strategic mechanisms employed to manage partnerships and to assess the outcomes that could be demonstrated to the public.

1.2 In October 2005 the joint review outlined a number of key steps that must be undertaken in order for the Council to be recognised as having a robust approach to partnership working. There is no question of the Council's commitment to this area of work yet developments are required to create a more corporate approach to partnership working and better management of them to ensure value for money. In response to the Audit Commission's recommendations the Council identified in the Corporate Plan that a review of all its key partnerships must take place and that appropriate mechanisms be developed to monitor the outcomes and quality of work delivered (through this way of working).

1.3 In January 2006 it was agreed that a review of the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust be undertaken and used to pilot the new Partnership Evaluation Tool that had been developed in response to the Audit Commission review.

1.4 The review addresses the following areas:

- To identify the different elements of funding provided by the Council to the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust
- To evidence that the work the Trust delivers relates to the funding given by the Council
- To identify that the Trust is best placed to deliver the work and that it is relevant to current Council priorities or mandatory responsibilities
- To consider the overall position of the partnership and recommend where improvements or changes should be made

The review has involved relevant officers from within the Council and has been undertaken in partnership with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust.

2. The Partnership Evaluation Tool

2.1 In order to review all of its main partnerships in a structured and fair manner the Council has developed a Partnership Evaluation Tool. The tool builds on the recommendations outlined by the Audit Commission review, the requirements of the Wiltshire Compact and national guidance on ensuring value for money from public partnerships.

2.2 The tool is structured around testing four key areas of partnership working:

Need – the basis for partnership funding

Framework – ensuring a structured approach

Process – effective management of the partnership

Outcomes – demonstrating achievement and impact

2.3 Each area consists of at least five key tests and requires evidence to be gathered to review the current performance or position of the partnership. Using such a tool will enable a full review of the partnership to be undertaken, one that is able to address both areas of strength and areas of weakness as well as highlighting where improvements can be made. The tests can be benchmarked using a scoring system that has been incorporated within the tool. The scores are there to determine the current position against each indicator and assess overall quality and outline where future improvement is required. The scores are as follows:

- (1) There is no evidence that the indicator is being met
- (2) There is some evidence that the indicator is being met
- (3) There is good evidence to show that the indicator is being met
- (4) There is clear robust evidence that shows the indicator is being fully met

2.4 The Wiltshire Wildlife Trust review is piloting the tool and a full evaluation of the tool's effectiveness will be undertaken once the review is complete. Developing a standard tool will enable the Council to review all of its partnerships in an even-handed manner ensuring that an accurate picture can be ascertained.

3. The Structure of the Partnership with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

3.1 One of the key recommendations from the Audit Commission Review of the Council's approach to partnership working is the need for a better corporate understanding of the partnerships that council service areas are engaged in. Limited corporate understanding leads to a lack of clarity on the size of partnership agreements, the work that is being delivered and the benefit of entering into such relationships.

3.2 The partnership between the Council and the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust is a good example of where there are a number of agreements funding various projects or pieces of work yet there is no overall corporate awareness of what is being delivered. This has led to confusion over the size of the partnership funding and uncertainty over the contribution being made towards the Councils corporate priorities.

Revenue Funding made to Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

3.3 The starting point for this review has been to identify the current funding the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust receives from the District Council and the projects the funding entails. The table shown below outlines the funding received by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust during 2005/2006.

Project / Agreement	Amount	NWDC Team Responsible
Local Agenda 21	£8000	Community Partnerships
Energy Efficiency	£5500	Strategic Housing
Environmental Grant	£14,000	Regeneration & Asset Management
Total	£27,500	

Capital Grants made to Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

3.4 In 2005 the following Capital grant was made to the trust in respect to purchase of land in the district for a nature reserve.

Blakehill Nature Reserve	£24,000
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3.5 This was the first Capital grant to be made to the trust since 2002. It is important to recognise that Capital Grants are rare and should not be considered as part of the working partnership that the Council has with the Wildlife Trust as this will miss-represent the partnership funding given on an annual basis. It is proposed that such applications for Capital grants in the future are considered as part of the Councils overall approach to grant making. Criteria and processes to awarding Capital grants in the future should form part of an overall review of the Councils grant-giving programme.

3.6 This review is focussing on the **£27,500** worth of annual partnership funding to supporting or delivering specific projects on behalf of the Council.

4. Energy Efficiency

4.1 One of the areas on which the Council works in partnership with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, (WWT) is to improve energy efficiency. The WWT highlight energy efficiency as a key area of work within their strategic plan and recognise it as being a key driver to ensuring a more a sustainable way of living. The responsibility for this work currently sits with the Strategic Housing Team.

The Need to work in Partnership

4.2 There are two very distinct reasons as to why the Council has chosen to work in partnership with the WWT to address energy efficiency. Firstly the Council has a mandatory responsibility to ensure that there is an improvement in energy efficiency across residential properties, and secondly supporting this work levers in other funding opportunities to support projects that bring added value to the North Wiltshire district.

4.3 The Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 requires all local authorities to prepare and report on an annual basis showing measures being taken that will lead to significant improvements in the energy efficiency of residential accommodation. The district has been set a target to improve energy efficiency by 30% by 2010.

4.4 To achieve this target requires that regular surveys of current energy efficiency be undertaken, that advice is given to residents on how they can be more energy efficient and the development of awareness raising projects take place. Each year the outcomes of this work must be collated in a report to the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and be signed off by the Council's Chief Executive.

4.5 Having reviewed the scope of the energy efficiency work, at present there is no existing resource within the housing team to deliver this area apart from managing the partnership already in place with the WWT on an ad-hoc basis. The WWT has the resource, expertise and capacity to gather the energy information required, to offer advice to residents and to develop projects. By working in partnership enables the Council to be able to access or benefit other work associated with this area that will positively impact on the district.

The Framework for Working in Partnership

4.6 A wider county group consisting of officers from all of the districts in Wiltshire including Swindon Borough Council agrees the overall direction of the energy efficiency work. This group is known as the Home Energy Conservation Act Group (HECA). In order to outline the activities of the partnership and confirm the funding available, a district Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the Council and the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust is agreed on an annual basis.

4.7 There is a robust SLA in place that identifies the expected outcomes and expectations from all partners including specific targets relating to the number surveys to be undertaken, training to be delivered and advice given to residents. It is fairly standard procedure for SLA's to be developed alongside a work plan of activity, however, in the case of the energy efficiency partnership there is no separate work plan in place as it seems to form part of the SLA itself. There is no particular problem with this as the SLA is very clear, but it is worth considering that the development of a work plan will enable the Council to better schedule in when it expects pieces of work to be delivered by the WWT. For example, ensuring that surveys are carried out

in the winter months as this is when energy efficiency is a key issue and then using the summer to develop projects and undertake promotional activities.

4.8 Given that the energy efficiency work is being driven by the mandatory responsibility placed on local authorities, the SLA has been put together using a number of fairly SMART based outcomes. These can be measured against the number of surveys being undertaken, the training being delivered and crucially the progress towards the overall improvement target set by central government. In respect to the development of a specific workplan there is an opportunity for the partnership to set more SMART targets that can be monitored.

Effective Management of the partnership

4.9 The partnership between the Council and the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust is managed through six weekly meetings of the HECA group. A member of the housing team attends these meetings and it is part of the SLA that a member of staff from the WWT also attends to update on the work being delivered and developed by the trust. The HECA meetings are used to ensure that a co-ordinated approach to energy efficiency is developed and to enable robust management of the partnership to take place. Managing the partnership in this way enables any issues around delivery to be identified and discussed as they occur.

4.10 One of the reasons that can be attributed to the success of this work is that there is a clear understanding between the officers of both organisations who are responsible for the project and from where support is available. It is worth noting however, that at an organisational level there is limited awareness of who is leading on this work and the mandatory duties it brings with it.

4.11 The target set by government to improve energy efficiency is to be delivered by 2010 means that the Council has 5 more years to reach its 30% target. It is likely that the Council will need to continue to develop this programme of work. Whether this continues to be delivered by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust in future years will need to be considered by the Council in relation to its resource and ability to ensure sufficient activity is undertaken so that progress towards the target can be maintained. It is important that as part of the future management of the partnership consideration is given and options are identified to that the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust see this as service related piece of work rather than core support.

Assessing the Outcomes & Impacts of the Partnership

4.12 The work being delivered by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust is enabling the Council to meet its mandatory duties to improving energy efficiency across residential property in the North Wiltshire District. So far a 17.5% improvement in energy efficiency has been achieved showing the Council to be making good progress towards meeting its 30% target.

4.13 Detailed below are some of the key outcomes delivered that have contributed to the Councils progress against the improvement target:

- 475 Surveys undertaken across the district
- 220 Tailored responses giving energy efficiency advice
- 39 Home visits across the County
- 84 occasions where verbal advice has been given via free phone number
- 3 presentations to community groups across the district and 1 training session

4.14 It is important to recognise that the energy efficiency work is not just addressing the improvement target set by government but it is also contributing to wider projects that are bringing added value to the district and overall demonstrating good value for money. A good example of this is the “Little Pledge”. The “Little Pledge” is a campaign throughout the Southwest to encourage people to pledge to save energy in their homes. Of all the pledges made in the South West one third came from Wiltshire & Swindon.

4.15 The outcomes and the work being delivered as a result of the partnership is also significantly impacting on a number of the Councils corporate priorities. These are:

- The Housing Strategy
- Partnership Working
- Equalities & Diversity

4.16 There is also a contribution towards the wider sustainability agenda and the Health through Warmth Strategy. The existence of the partnership and the work it is delivering enables the community to lever out national grants to improve energy efficiency in their homes to the sum of £44,500.

4.17 The Council funds the WWT Energy Efficiency Centre to the sum of £5,500.

4.18 The current level of funding roughly equates to the cost of one quarter of an officer's time and does not allow for any of the hidden costs such as follow up, promotion and scanning of information which the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust also undertake. For the Council to deliver this work in house a minimum 0.5 officer would be required, however, it is important to recognise that the Council could not tap in to the additional external resources that the Wildlife Trust are able to. This would therefore significantly reduce the added value brought to the district.

Areas of Strength

4.20 Working in partnership with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust has enabled the Council to make significant progress towards meeting its mandatory requirements on improving energy efficiency. This can be evidenced by the 17.5% improvement that has already been achieved.

4.21 Success has been down to the firm foundations that this particular partnership is built on. There is a strong sense of agreement amongst all partners on the direction that the work needs to take in order for the improvement targets to be met.

4.22 The Service Level Agreement that governs the work is robust and clear in its expectations and ensures that all partners are fully aware of their responsibilities and duties placed on them.

4.23 The level of funding provided is £5,500. By working in partnership and having a joint agreement across the statutory authorities as to the work being delivered by the WWT means that the cost to each Council is significantly lower than the actual cost to deliver it.

Areas of Weakness

4.24 The principle weakness of the SLA for energy efficiency is that it does not come with a specific work plan that schedules in when surveys are to be conducted and when promotional work should take place. Officers have recognised that a workplan would enable the monitoring to become more SMART.

4.25 There is currently no provision in place to gain customer feedback or to monitor what service users are saying as part of the monitoring process. It is important that as funders we are able to gauge opinion as to the quality of the service being delivered by those that use or benefit from the work. It may be that a requirement in future SLA's be included that's asks for customer feedback.

4.26 The current SLA is agreed on an annual basis. Under the terms of the Wiltshire Compact it is important that consideration is given towards a 2/3 year SLA where the targets can be adjusted each year. This will then ensure that the funding for the work is secured.

Recommendations:

4.27 To continue working in partnership with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust to deliver the programme of work on improving energy efficiency

4.28 A work plan be developed alongside the SLA that will schedule in specific programmes of work enabling monitoring to become more SMART

4.29 Consideration is given towards entering into a 2 / 3 year Service Level Agreement in line with Compact requirements.

5. Environmental Grants

5.1 The Second area the Council works in partnership with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust is funded through the environmental grants programme managed by the Regeneration and Asset Management Team. This area of funding is quite complex in that it supports three separate programmes of bio-diversity work. These are as follows:

- The Biological Records Centre
- The Wildlife Sites Project
- Rebuilding Bio-diversity Project

5.2 The total amount of Environmental Grants given during 2005/6 was £14,000 of funding for the above projects.

5.3 Although there are 3 individual bio-diversity projects undertaken by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust the monitoring and management of them from the Council's perspective falls under one grant. For this report each project will be dealt within the same section.

The Need to work in Partnership

The Biological Records Centre (BRC)

5.4 The Biological Records Centre acts as a repository for bio-diversity data within Wiltshire, holding over 500,000 records on species of plants and animals.

5.5 The Council has a mandatory duty through "Planning Policy Statement 9" that development plans and planning decisions are all based on up to date environmental and conservation information that can inform the decision making process. In order to fulfil this duty the Council needs to be able to access this information in a co-ordinated and up to date manner.

5.6 The Biological Records Centre is able to offer this facility and keep comprehensive records that are monitored and updated on a regular basis. The BRC is able to screen 12,000 planning applications each year and is developing a new database system in order to become more efficient. The Council does not have the infrastructure or resources in place to be able to undertake this work yet it needs to be able to access the information the BRC holds when required.

Wildlife Sites Project

5.7 The Wildlife sites project is strategic work that builds a picture of the local environment and then provides information and evidence that can inform future planning or development policy. The project also provides support to landowners whose land has been identified as a Wildlife site to ensure the appropriate management of it.

5.8 There is a mandatory duty outlined in Planning Policy Statement 9 and Planning Policy Statement 12 that requires local authorities to have information regarding local wildlife sites so that an evidence base can be co-ordinated to inform planning decisions made by the Council. As with the Biological Records Centre the Council does not have the infrastructure, resource or expertise to gather this information on its own. With the growing spatial planning requirements there is need

to be able to access the information gathered by this project in order to inform future development policy.

Rebuilding Bio-diversity

5.9 The Re-building Bio-diversity project is unique to the North Wiltshire District and is one of the first projects in the region to focus specifically on landscape scale conservation. The project aims to restore and recreate wildlife habitat to deliver ecologically viable areas for wildlife, as well as promoting rural economic regeneration.

5.10 The Council has a responsibility under Planning Policy Statement 9 to consider issues that relate to the rebuilding of bio-diversity and that such information can be used in the future to inform the emerging spatial planning strategy for the district.

5.11 Recent changes to the Common Agricultural Policy have meant a change in focus for subsidies which are no longer coupled to productivity but are geared towards bio-diversity and the environment instead.

5.12 One of the key focuses of this project is that it aims to be very practical in delivering the project outcomes. The project is not just about informing strategy it is ensuring that there is adequate support on the ground for farmers and landowners in engaging them in the bio-diversity agenda. The Council has a duty through the development of its policy to maintain and enhance bio-diversity and this project provides the scope in which to meet some of these requirements.

The Framework for Working in Partnership

5.13 The Biological Records Centre, the Wildlife Sites project and the Rebuilding Bio-diversity project are all funded through an Environmental Grant from the Council. Given the nature of their funding there is currently no Service Level Agreement in place to manage the programmes of work, instead they are managed through the conditions attached to the environmental grants funding. Officers from both the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and from the Council recognise that a Service Level Agreement would provide the framework in which to build on the management of the partnership. All three projects relate to Policies in the Countryside and Open Space Strategy.

5.14 The review has highlighted that the environmental grants programme comes with a robust set of grant conditions that monitor the funding given to the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. The conditions are clear in outlining:

- The process for receiving the funding and applying to the grant programme
- Expectations relating to the work to be undertaken and the strategic links that must be made
- The Financial Conditions
- Accountability and where responsibility lies for reporting and monitoring progress
- Clarity on the renewal process for future grants, which also stipulates that consideration must be given to the sustainability of the projects in the long term by the WWT.

5.15 It is a condition of the grant that each of the projects must be supported with a workplan outlining the activities to be undertaken and that they demonstrate how they relate to the Councils needs and wider priorities.

5.16 The Biological Records Centre work plan directly relates to the Council's mandatory duties of keeping an evidence base on key aspects of environmental characteristics to inform the Local Development Framework (LDF) and the overall approach to spatial planning. The BRC also undertakes the day to day screening of planning applications submitted to the Council.

5.17 The Wildlife Sites Project work plan encompasses the wider strategic plan of the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and requires that cross cutting themes be addressed such as social inclusion, young people and health. As well as linking to the Countryside and Open Space Strategy the Wildlife Sites project also informs the LDF and elements of the Community Strategy. Apart from the strategic work this project also provides training, support and access to grants for landowners therefore acting as a lever to future support.

5.18 The Rebuilding Bio-diversity project comes with a project workplan that outlines the key activities to be undertaken over the year. The workplan directly relates to the project objectives and has relevance to both the Council and the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. This project is about delivering on the ground and supporting the local community to address bio-diversity issues as well as underpinning the work of the other two projects.

Managing the Partnership with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

5.19 Each of the three programmes of work are reviewed and monitored by a project group that consists of officers from the partner councils, English Nature, and the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. The project groups meet on a quarterly basis where figures and descriptions of the work being undertaken are given to the funders. For the Biological Records Centre there is also an AGM where feedback on the years activities are supplied.

5.20 With the projects being monitored via a management group then it is clear who is responsible from each of the partners for supporting this work and where responsibility lies. As with the energy efficiency work there does seem to be some lack of corporate awareness within NWDC of why service areas support and fund the WWT to deliver specific projects.

5.21 The partnership funding arrangements for the three projects are managed as one package. At present the Executive recommends a block payment to the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust from the Environmental Grants fund. It is agreed between the partners that the WWT then allocate the award between the three bio-diversity projects. The financial reporting occurs through the various liaison and project management meetings that are held each quarter. In the cases of the Biological Records Centre and the Wildlife Sites Project the Council is effectively paying for a service which it needs in order to meet a number of mandatory requirements. Any exit strategy therefore would require the Council to seek a different provider or to deliver in house.

5.22 The partnership is managed in an effective and productive manner. The partners seem to be broadly in keeping with the Compact requirements and the environmental grants programme meets the recommendations out lined in the Funding & Procurement code of practice. In order to ensure that the partnership continues to operate in an effective manner and given that two of the bio-diversity

projects meet mandatory requirements placed on the Council, the Compact indicates that a Service Level Agreement would be a more appropriate mechanism for managing this partnership funding. The guidance states that where there is a “service based relationship”, in order to ensure transparency, fairness and stability then a SLA should be considered.

Assessing the Impact & Outcomes of the Partnership

The Biological Records Centre

5.23 Over the last twelve months a total of 3,520 planning applications were screened by the BRC. This equates to 27% of the total number of screenings across the county making the Council the highest user of the service. A total of 109 of those applications screened were then forwarded for consultation.

5.24 In addition to the day to day screening of planning applications the BRC has undertaken a number of data searches and information gathering projects. During 2004/5 33.5 hours were spent on responding to requests for bio-diversity information within the North Wiltshire District, making up 28% of the total time spent on such work.

5.25 Much of the statistics the BRC co-ordinates come from volunteers across the County who gather information and then forward their findings to the records centre. The BRC runs a number of volunteer-based projects, such as training and mentoring, without which would make the in-depth information gathering difficult to undertake.

5.26 The information the BRC gathers contributes to the Local Development Framework and by having a co-ordinated database of protected species and sites managed by professionals’ enables the Council to be able to access relevant and accurate information. In terms of added value the BRC operates using a range of volunteering opportunities as well as providing some linkage to issues raised in the Community Strategy such as appropriate development and protecting the rural buffer.

5.27 As part of this review the Biological Records Centre submitted information relating to the costs of their service. Currently the BRC receives £4,500 of the environmental grant, but recent analysis shows that it actually costs £10,047 to deliver the work for North Wilts. The funding shortfall is made up from WCC reserves.

5.28 The BRC has a separate web page within the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust website. It is not clear from the website that the Council supports this area of work and therefore the opportunity to demonstrate the effective partnership working between the Council and the Trust is not as clear as it could be. It is important to also recognise that the Council does not promote through its own website the partnership working undertaken with the BRC.

Wildlife Sites Project

5.29 Recent figures from the Wildlife Sites Project show that a total of 2,275 sites are listed on the database with 193,031 species records for those sites. During this year 935 hectares of Wildlife Sites were surveyed with 11 non-sites visited for new assessment leading to a number of new sites now being identified.

5.30 The outcomes of the Wildlife Sites Project contributes to the Wiltshire & Swindon Bio-diversity Action Plan and links directly to the work being delivered

through the Biological Records Centre. The linkage between the two projects is essential as the information the Wildlife Sites project gathers enables the BRC to have an accurate and up to date database of current environmental characteristics of the area.

5.31 One of the outcomes of the funding is that landowners and farmers receive support when working with these sites. As a result the project produces a newsletter called the “Peewit” which provides advice and information on managing wildlife sites in order to keep them in touch with current legislation and policy changes at both a national and local level. The project promotes grant programmes such as the “England Woodland Grant Scheme.” It is therefore clear that the Wildlife sites project not only reinforces the evidence base being collated by the BRC but it also plays a practical and supporting role to the local community who may be affected by such sites.

5.32 As with the Biological Records Centre there is a mandatory requirement to pay attention to a system of local wildlife sites. The project provides this service at a reasonable cost that would be significantly higher if sourced commercially.

Rebuilding Bio-diversity Project

5.33 The Re-building Bio-diversity project is currently in its first year of operation and has focussed on analysing habitats and species in the area, identifying and mapping priority areas and researching the attitudes and preferences of farmers and landowners towards bio-diversity. Detailed maps have also been produced of where there are bio-diversity gaps in the district.

5.34 The project was officially launched in December 2004 where there was commitment made by a number of landowners to the project and towards dedicating land for the creation of meadows and woodland.

5.35 The project is part funded from other sources including charities and trusts, but this funding is dependent upon match funding from existing partners.

Overall Areas of Strength

5.36 There is a clear need from the Council’s perspective to fund the three bio-diversity projects outlined in this section based on both mandatory duties the Council has a responsibility to deliver, and the added value and contribution the schemes make towards other strategies and programmes of work.

5.37 There is a strong partnership relationship between the two organisations, which has enabled the successful development of the projects. Officers are aware of their responsibilities and there is good evidence of joint working with the trust and the other district councils. This has ensured that from a partnership point of view the principles of the Compact are being embedded through the working relationship.

5.38 The funding is currently provided through the environmental grants programme. The conditions of the grant and the way, which the funding is managed, has ensured there is clarity regarding the outcomes expected and reporting required from partners.

5.39 From the Council’s perspective the small level of funding provided, ensures that a number of key mandatory duties are met as well as providing support for the local community in addressing bio-diversity issues such as wildlife sites. The

evidence this review has gathered would recommend the funding of these projects and the complimentary nature of them demonstrates good value for money.

Overall Areas of Weakness

5.40 There is lack of corporate awareness as to why this funding is given and the work the three projects deliver. Given that the funding enables the Council to meet a number of its mandatory duties it is important that an overall understanding of the partnership with Wiltshire wildlife Trust is developed so that future funding decisions can be made with all the evidence available.

5.41 The projects are currently funded through a £14,000 Environmental grant. There is no doubt that the grant is managed effectively but consideration towards a more secure mechanism for funding must be considered. At present funding via a grant raises questions associated with the Wiltshire Compact, in terms of long term sustainability. There is also an issue relating to the security of funding each year. The environmental grants budget is reducing year on year yet the demand for the knowledge and information the Council requires on environmental characteristics in order to meet its mandatory duties is ever increasing. There is a careful balance to be made and providing the funding through a grant may not be the most appropriate mechanism.

5.42 It has been proposed by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust to consider managing the projects using individual service level agreements. Whilst this review will suggest a reorganisation in the funding of the projects through the Environmental grants programme there is real weakness in developing three individual SLA's. Given that the three projects all link with each other and deliver specific things that compliment each other, it would be far more effective and robust to have one service level agreement that oversees the three projects and demonstrates through the monitoring requirements what each individual project must deliver. Moving to this approach will ensure more efficient and effective use of officer time and will provide greater clarity from an organisation point of view as to why these projects are funded and how they contribute to the delivery of the Councils corporate priorities.

Recommendations:

5.43 That the £14,000 of environmental grant funding to support the three projects is protected as part of a SLA.

5.44 That additional funds are found to raise the level of funding to the WWT in the light of this review.

5.45 That the work is governed by one SLA that encompasses the three projects and is managed by a named service area.

5.46 Consideration is given to the impact of moving funding from the Environmental Grants Budget to a SLA budget. Over recent years the Environmental Grants budget has not increased at a sufficient rate to cover the mandatory funding of other areas of work and so some grant recipients have seen their funding decrease; the WWT have been in this category.

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5.47 That there is more work developed on raising awareness and recognising the partnership working between the two organisations and then demonstrating it to the local community.

5.48 The Council must ensure that the outcomes of the work being delivered by the WWT are used effectively across the range of Council services affected by it planning, regeneration or community development.

6. Local Agenda 21 (Wiltshire World Changers Programme)

6.1 The third area the Council works in partnership with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust relates to the sustainability agenda. This area of work is now called the Wiltshire World Changers programme, but in the past was known as Local Agenda 21. The responsibility for the funding and management of this work sits with the Community Partnerships Team.

6.2 Agenda 21 came out of the Rio World Summit held in 1992, where it was recognised that countries had a responsibility to work in a more sustainable way to ensure the long-term protection of the environment. With national governments signing up to this commitment, a social responsibility was placed on local authorities to develop this practice in their areas backed up by some early Best Value indicators. Given the responsibility placed on them, many authorities appointed Agenda 21 officers and work was undertaken with a range of partners to develop programmes that could work towards the Agenda 21 principles at a local level.

6.3 Over the last couple of years the focus of Agenda 21 has changed in that the issue of sustainability is in fact a cross cutting theme that cannot sit as the responsibility of one particular service area. At the same time the development of community planning and Local Strategic Partnerships has enabled this issue to be taken on at a more strategic level. As a result of changing priorities the Council does not have a dedicated Agenda 21 officer.

The Need to work in Partnership

6.4 The Community Plans and the Community Strategy in North Wiltshire highlight issues associated with sustainability and environmental protection. Agenda 21 sought to recognise that sustainability should address environmental, economic and social issues demonstrating that there are clear links to the emerging plans and strategies of the partnerships in North Wiltshire. The Council is an enabler and does not have the sole responsibility to deliver the Community Plans or the Community Strategy, instead it is about working in partnership or initiating opportunities where work can be developed that will address the issues being raised. The Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, World Changers programme provides this opportunity.

6.5 Although Agenda 21 does not fall under one specific Corporate Priority it does form part of the Council's vision for 2020:

“For Sustainability to be at the heart of everything we do”
- NWDC Corporate Plan

6.6 The World Changers programme aims to work towards the following outcomes:

- Develop and implement practical programmes of action in key areas of sustainability
- Provide a framework for action and develop work at a strategic level
- Promote the World Changers programme to local communities
- To identify additional project funding
- To undertake specific work relating to the district

6.6 The Wiltshire Wildlife Trust is best placed to deliver the environmental aspect of the sustainability work. Sustainability forms part of the organisations strategic aim and they have the resource and expertise to undertake the projects with a strong

volunteer base providing visibility across the district. The Wiltshire Wildlife Trust are able to access other grants and funding streams which local authorities would not be able to and this ensures added value and additional resource can be developed.

6.7 The World Changers programme operates in two ways. One is based on developing and delivering projects and opportunities out in the community, whereas the other is to identify new funding opportunities that can enhance the sustainability work. This is important to recognise as some of the projects developed under the World Changers programme compliment and impact directly on some of the other work that this review has looked at, including energy efficiency for example.

The Framework for Working in Partnership

6.7 The World Changers programme is supported by the Local Agenda 21 partnership consisting of Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, all of the District Councils, Swindon Borough Council and Wiltshire County Council. This is where the funders meet to discuss the direction of the World Changers Programme and monitor the outcomes of the project. The group agrees the overall direction of the project and a Service Level Agreement has been drawn up to govern the partnership.

6.8 The current Service Level Agreement is only in place for six months. The reason for this is that the partnership has recognised that the initial Agenda 21 programme has moved on, and that any sustainability work should reflect the growing community development angle that is evolving across Wiltshire. In response to this the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust has submitted a bid to the Big Lottery for £500,000 over five years to enable the World Changers programme to develop and be more responsive to the current sustainability drive. Given the implications of this, the partners have decided to negotiate a six-month programme of work by which time the result of the application will be known.

6.9 The Service Level Agreement that is in place is fairly robust and clearly outlines the expectations of all parties and details clear guidance as to the monitoring requirements, conditions of funding, dispute procedures and who the main points of contact are. An annual work plan is agreed by the Agenda 21 partnership as a whole. This reflects both local authority needs and those of the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust who have identified this work as part of their core activities.

6.10 The review has highlighted that this area of funding needs significant development given that the outcomes of the work plan are not as SMART as they could be. There is an underlying issue with the World Changers programme in that there is a difference in opinion amongst the partners as to the type of targets that the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust should be working towards. The issue centres on the difference between delivering projects on the ground and being able to undertake strategic development work. This has led to the work plan not being SMART. Wiltshire Wildlife Trust feel that the funding should also be used to enable them to develop new funding applications and project ideas whereas some partners feel that there needs to be focussed delivery on the ground.

Effective Management of the Partnership

6.11 The World Changers programme is monitored through the Agenda 21 Partnership. The partners meet twice a year to review the progress being made and to discuss future developments for the project. There is no formal review undertaken and the approach to monitoring the project is not as robust as it could be. This is not due solely to the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, there is a responsibility for all of the partners

to become clearer on what the funding delivers and the requirements for monitoring them.

6.12 The service level agreement makes it clear who the link officers should be from both organisations, but both the Council and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust recognise that there needs to be an improvement in the overall communication where the World Changers programme is concerned.

6.13 The Community Partnerships Team undertakes the funding and management of the World Changers Partnership from this Council's perspective. £8,000 is given on an annual basis to support Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and the funding is then allocated towards the different elements of the World Changers programme by the Trust themselves. Annual Reports and audited statements of accounts are submitted to the Council as part of the financial reporting requirements and the partners are given updates on the World Changers budget.

6.14 The partnership has recognised that the World Changers programme is not operating as effectively as it could do and in order to address this and develop longer term stability, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust have submitted an application to the Big Lottery fund for this project. The application is for £500,000 over five years and will enable the World Changers project to grow with the development of new posts and the resources to be able to take the project out into the community.

Assessing the Outcomes & Impacts of the Partnership

6.15 Although there are a number of important developments to be made to the World Changers programme around the monitoring of the project and ensuring clearer outcomes, a great deal has also been achieved.

6.16 One of the main achievements over the last year has been the Green Map project. The Green map will form part of a new website being developed by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust to help people find out about and get involved in local environmental projects and sites, in and around Wiltshire. This will include local recycling projects, nature reserves, volunteering opportunities and fair-trade outlets to name a few. The Green Map will be able to provide up to date local information and will be really useful to bodies such as the Community Partnerships. The Green Map is expected to launch in spring 2006.

6.17 A new community focussed newsletter is being produced that will provide support and information on current projects or how people can become more involved. The first edition was published in January 2006. Another area that the World Changers programme has been able to support has been focussed on building awareness of Fair-trade products. The Wiltshire Wildlife Trust has delivered over 50 fair-trade training sessions and has been working with the Council in raising awareness. The Council now has a Fair-trade champion who receives support from the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust.

6.18 The World Changers programme has enabled the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust to start working at a more strategic level and progress is being made in linking with the countywide strategic partnership through their environment-working group.

6.19 Apart from the direct projects the World Changers funding delivers, it is also able to contribute to wider projects that demonstrate outcomes that impact on the Councils priorities. Some examples of these contributions are waste minimisation, sustainable energy and wildlife and people. The waste minimisation work has saved

over 2744 tonnes across the County, whereas the development of the Climate Friendly Communities project will bring added value to the energy efficiency work that the Council must deliver on. It is important to recognise that this work will provide a range of opportunities for the Community Partnerships to implement some of the issues they raised in this area.

Areas of Strength

6.20 The World Changers partnership has the full support of all the local authorities and by having this in place means that a co-ordinated approach to improving sustainability can be achieved.

6.21 It has been crucial that the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust recognised that the existing Agenda 21 project needed to be developed and be more responsive to the current direction that local authorities are being asked to move towards. With this recognition there is a real opportunity to make the World Changers programme a real success.

6.22 The current work being undertaken meets both direct project outcomes such as the Green Map as well as making a significant contribution to other Wiltshire Wildlife Trust projects. This will bring added value benefit because it has enabled extra resource and delivery to compliment other projects the Council funds, such as Energy Efficiency.

6.23 If the application to the Big Lottery is successful then the funding the Council provides to the World Changers programme will act as a lever. This will ensure that there is significant development in the delivery of work associated with sustainability and mean more specialised support for the Community Partnerships and the Local Strategic Partnership in the future.

Areas of Weakness

6.25 The partnership must improve on the monitoring and reviewing procedures for the World Changers programme. At present it is too flexible and for the level of funding it is important that partners are much clearer as to the outcomes to be delivered through this work.

6.26 If the big Lottery bid were to be unsuccessful then the partners will need to address the scope of the project with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust in order to make it more SMART. It is important that consideration is given towards ensuring that the World Changers programme reflects the needs being identified by the community and that support is available for them.

6.27 Both the Council and the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust do not communicate effectively on the World Changers programme and there needs to be an improvement in this in order to develop the project further.

Recommendations

6.28 To continue supporting the World Changers programme and work with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust in developing their application to the Big Lottery.

6.29 To undertake a needs assessment with the Community Partnerships Team, as to the contribution the World Changers programme could make to the Community Area Partnerships and the Local Strategic Partnership.

6.30 To work with the Agenda 21 partnership in developing the monitoring process to ensure that the outcomes of the World Changers programme can be more effectively demonstrated and reviewed. This would include requiring a quarterly monitoring report rather than a six monthly one.

7. Conclusions

7.1 The review has highlighted that the partnership between the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and the Council is built on solid foundations and sound working relationships between the officers of both organisations.

7.2 The partnership with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust not only helps support some of the Council's discretionary work; it also is a key delivery agent in enabling the Council to meet a number of its mandatory duties. As a result of this way of working significant added value can be demonstrated to the local community based on the opportunities that are accessed such as wider grant programmes and volunteering.

7.3 To improve and strengthen the partnership further, the Council needs to develop a more strategic corporate approach to the management of the relationship with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. This can be achieved by officers within the Council meeting over the course of a year to update each other on the progress of individual projects. Undertaking this approach will also ensure that there is opportunity to discuss the overall direction of the partnership with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and to address any issues of concern.

7.4 The outcomes of the review show that the activities of the partnership directly relate to the Council's Corporate Priorities as well as addressing issues in the Community Strategy and the Community Plans. After considering all of the information the review has highlighted and the level of funding provided, it is clear that the partnership with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust provides real value for money for the work that they undertake.

Summary of Review Recommendations

Energy Efficiency

4.27 To continue working in partnership with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust to deliver the programme of work on improving energy efficiency

4.28 A work plan be developed alongside the SLA that will schedule in specific programmes of work enabling monitoring to become more SMART

4.29 Consideration is given towards entering into a 2 / 3 year Service Level Agreement in line with Compact requirements.

Environmental Grant

5.43 That the £14,000 of environmental grant funding to support the three projects is protected as part of a SLA.

5.44 That additional funds are found to raise the level of funding to the WWT in the light of this review.

5.45 That the work is governed by one SLA that encompasses the three projects and is managed by a named service area.

5.46 Consideration is given to the impact of moving funding from the Environmental Grants Budget to a SLA budget. . Over recent years the Environmental Grants budget has not increased at a sufficient rate to cover the mandatory funding of other areas of work and so some grant recipients have seen their portion decrease; the WWT have been in this category.

5.47 That there is more work developed on raising awareness and recognising the partnership working between the two organisations and then demonstrating it to the local community.

5.48 The council must ensure that the outcomes of the work being delivered by the WWT are used effectively across the range of Council services affected be it planning, regeneration or community development.

World Changers (Local Agenda 21)

6.28 To continue supporting the World Changers programme and work with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust in developing their application to the Big Lottery.

6.29 To undertake a needs assessment with the Community Partnerships Team, as to the contribution the World Changers programme could make to the Community Area Partnerships and the Local Strategic Partnership.

6.30 To work with the Agenda 21 partnership in developing the monitoring process to ensure that the outcomes of the World Changers programme can be more effectively demonstrated and reviewed. This would include requiring a quarterly monitoring report rather than a six monthly one.

Overall Management of Partnership

- 7.1 Officers who work in partnership with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust meet twice a year to review the work being undertaken and the outcomes being delivered.
- 7.2 Copies of the SLA's and associated work plans are held in one place along with summaries of the work being delivered each year that can easily accessed in order for a picture of the whole partnership to be available.
- 7.3 Following this review, officers produce a joint action plan outlining how the recommendations will be implemented over the coming year.