

Environmental Grants

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report recommends payment of grants from the Environmental Grants budget for 2006/07.

2. Recommendations

It is Recommended that the Executive:

- 2.1 **Note the contents of this report, in particular 7.3.**

- 2.2 **Approve the grant payments as detailed in 7.2.**

3. Links to the Corporate/Business Area Objectives

- 3.1 Under the Corporate Plan priority area of Bouyant Economy, this report links to the following two aims:

- i. Put in place the mechanisms to identify the needs of urban and rural communities.
- ii. Work with community groups and partner organisations to respond to those needs.

- 3.2 The report also links to the following Corporate Plan actions:

- i. Implementation of the Countryside and Open Space Strategy.
- ii. Maintain, monitor and review all countryside partnerships.

4 Background Information

- 4.1 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. A decision is made at this time of the year to enable organisations to plan financially with some certainty.

- 4.2 Applicants must show that they are addressing the issues set out in the approved grant criteria, as shown in **Appendix 1**.

- 4.3 The budget for this financial year is £31,700.

5. Committed Funds

- 5.1 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. The work of the former is directed by a Conservation Board, set up in 2004 by agreement of the Secretary of State for the Environment under the CRoW Act legislation. The Board is fairly autonomous with no direct representation from the local authorities. The North Wessex Downs AONB is guided by a Partnership on which the Council has Member and Officer representation.

- 5.2 This statutory obligation is met by making a financial contribution from the Environmental Grants budget to the AONB's, the amount of which is formula based determined by the extent of the AONB within North Wiltshire.
- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 Members sit on the Forest Committee, which meets biannually, whilst Officers attend the Committee and the Senior Partners meeting. The GWCF is a key countryside partner, working along side the Regeneration and Asset Management Team on a number of projects, which further the aims of the Countryside and Open Space Strategy.
- 5.5 The GWCF's main financial supporter is the Forestry Commission, however, this funding will be withdrawn in March 2007, leaving a significant shortfall in their budget. Whilst this may instigate a request for higher levels of funding for the financial year 2007/08, it is felt appropriate that the same level of grant (£4,000) is given this year.

6 Applications

6.1 As well as the above organisations, applications for funding have been made by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, BTCV, the Cotswold Canal Trust, and the Wilts and Berks Canal Trust.

6.2 The Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

6.2.1 At its meeting on 22nd July 2004 the Executive resolved that:

One single service level agreement be developed with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust for 2005/2006 onwards, which incorporates all the principles of the Wiltshire Compact and which clearly identifies links to Council priorities.

This resolution led to a review of the partnership between the Council and the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. This review was completed recently and was presented to the Executive on 9th March of this year. The review looked at all of the Trust's activities including the projects supported by the Environmental Grants budget. It found that the partnership was working well, and that value for money was being achieved, but, awareness of the partnership was not as good as it could be. The review could be used as justification for increasing the level of funding to the Trust significantly but the current budget would not allow this to be achieved to a realistic level.

6.2.2 At the Executive meeting on the 9th March it was resolved to:

Agree to the development of an action plan that brings together all of the review recommendations, and that officer's work to implement them during 2006/7.

This work would also include the development of an SLA for all areas of the Trust's work and would remove them from the grant application process, offering longer-term financial security. An SLA would enable the Council to meet its obligations under the Wiltshire Compact as well as giving a more robust framework to the partnership.

6.2.3 **Appendix 2** gives more detail of the three projects run by the Trust for which they are seeking grant funding.

6.3 Other Applications

6.3.1 The Wilts & Berks Canal Trust, the Cotswolds Canal Trust, and BTCV all undertake work which has value to the natural environment, the built environment and the communities of North Wiltshire, and are contributing to the aims of the Countryside and Open Space Strategy. An outline of the work undertaken by these organisations can also be seen in **Appendix 2**.

7 **Financial Implications**

7.1 The available budget for 2006/07 is £31,700, a rise of £700 from 2005/06. The two AONB's will receive an increase of 3% over the previous year. Following the review of WWT, and the recognition that significant value for money is being realised, it is recommended that a small increase of grant be offered this year, to fit within the existing budget. This can be achieved by offering the same amount of grant to the GWCF, BTCV, the Wilts and Berks Canal Trust and the Cotswold Canal Trust as last year.

7.2 Table 1 below summarises the proposed grant distribution for this year, along with the grant awarded in the previous two years.

Table 1: Grant budget summary

Name of organisation	Grant 2004/05	Grant 2005/06	Grant requested 2006/07	Grant recommended 2006/07
Cotswolds AONB	£6,589	£6,787	£6,991	£6,991
N. Wessex Downs AONB	£2,785	£3,464	£3,568	£3,568
Wiltshire Wildlife Trust	£14,200 ¹	£14,000 ¹	£20,000 ¹	£14,392 ¹
Great Western CF	£4,000	£4,000	£4,000	£4,000
Cotswold Canal Trust	£576	£550	£2,500	£550
Wilts & Berks Canal Trust	£1,600	£1,500	£2,500	£1,500
BTCV	£750	£699	£1,200	£699
Total	£30,500	£31,000	£40,759	£31,700

¹ This figure is for three separate projects (the Wildlife Sites Project, the Swindon and Wiltshire Biological Records Centre, and the Rebuilding Biodiversity Project, as well as Corporate Membership to the Trust).

7.3 At the appropriate time it is proposed that a 2007/08 budget growth bid of approximately £10,000 be made to increase the available funds in the Environmental Grants Budget. This will enable an increase of grant to WWT as supported by the recent review of the partnership and introduction of an SLA. It would also allow all grants to receive inflationary rises rather than be frozen or reduced as has happened in recent years.

8. Environmental and Community Implications

8.1 All of the applications will provide environmental and community benefits. More detail is provided in the project summaries in **Appendix 2**.

9. Human Resources Implications

9.1. There are no Human Resources implications directly related to this report.

Documents Used in Preparing this Report:

- Grant applications

REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENT STRATEGIC MANAGER TO THE EXECUTIVE - 11th MAY 2006

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