

REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE

Report No. 15

Date of Meeting	7 th June 2007
Title of Report	Environmental Grants
Portfolio	Leisure and Economy
Link to Corporate Priorities	Spatial Planning, Bouyant Economy & Healthy Lifestyles
Key Decision	Yes
Executive Workplan Ref	B341
Public Report	Yes

Summary of Report

This report recommends payment of grants from the Environmental Grants budget for 2007/08.

Officer Recommendations

To approve Option 1: Payment of grant to organisations as detailed in 5.2.

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	Yes

Contact Officer	Michael Hasted Senior Regeneration Officer 01249 706489 mhasted@northwiltshire.gov.uk
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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. A decision on the amount of grant is made early in the financial year to enable organisations to plan financially with some certainty.
- 1.2 Applicants must show that they are addressing the issues set out in the approved grant criteria, which are shown in **Appendix 1**, and must contribute to the aims of the **Countryside and Open Space Strategy**.
- 1.3 The budget for this financial year is £32,020.

2. Options and Options Appraisal

- 2.1 **Option 1:** The Executive approves payment of grant as detailed in 5.2.
- 2.2 **Option 2:** The Executive re-apportionment the amounts given to organisations. This would only be possible (see section 3) for the Wildlife Trust, BTCV and the Canal Trusts and would likely give rise to financial difficulty to those affected.

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 2** for an explanation of these), the amount of which is formula based, determined by the extent of the AONB within North Wiltshire.
- 3.2 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 and recently organised the successful Wootton Bassett Forest Festival. At the Executive meeting of 27th May 2004 the decision was made to raise the grant to £4,000 in view of the Council becoming a member of the Community Forest's Senior Partners Committee. Remaining a member of this Committee is essential to ensure that the Council has a continued input into directing the Forest's work.
- 3.3 At its meeting of 19th April 2007 the Executive Committee approved the review of the Countryside and Open Space Strategy which included a strengthened policy with regard to funding of the Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre (BRC). The BRC undertake a planning screen service which ensures that the Council can meet its statutory duties with regard to planning services. The BRC is an independent organisation with constituent members from all the local authorities in Wiltshire, Natural England, the Environment Agency, the Wildlife Trust and representatives from individual volunteer biological recorders. The BRC is hosted by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and in previous years the grant contribution has been paid directly to the Trust. However, the BRC is keen to show its independence from the

Trust by entering into a three year Service Level Agreement (SLA) which will provide financial security and allow consistent budgeting for the BRC.

4. Applications

- 4.1 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. Further information on these organisations is given in **Appendix 2**.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 The available budget for 2007/08 is £32,020, a rise of £320 from the previous financial year which is specifically to cover the inflationary rise of the two AONB budgets.
- 5.2 Table 5.1 below summarises the proposed grant distribution for this year, along with the grant awarded in the previous two years.

Table 5.1: Grant budget summary

Name of organisation	Grant 2005/06	Grant 2006/07	Grant requested 2007/08	Recommended Grant 2007/08
Cotswolds AONB	£6,787	£6,991	£7,201	£7,201
N. Wessex Downs AONB	£3,464	£3,568	£3,675	£3,675
Wiltshire Wildlife Trust	£14,000	£14,392	£15,000 ¹	£9,894 ¹
Wiltshire & Swindon BRC	-	-	£10,000 ²	£4,500
Great Western CF	£4,000	£4,000	£4,000	£4,000
Cotswold Canal Trust	£550	£550	£2,500	£550
Wilts & Berks Canal Trust	£1,500	£1,500	£2,500	£1,500
BTCV	£699	£699	£1,200	£700
Total	£31,000	£31,700	£46,076	£32,020

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

² The calculated 'real' cost of providing the service.

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 (in essence their mandates) include measures that not only mitigate against adverse effects but also bring many community benefits.

7. Equality and diversity Implications

7.1 No equality or diversity issues have been identified.

8. Risk Analysis

8.1 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.

Appendices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appendix 1 – Grant Conditions• Appendix 2 – Summary of Organisations and their Applications
Background Documents Used in the Preparation of this Report:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Applications

Previous Decisions Connected with this Report

Report	Committee & Date	Minute Reference
Countryside and Open Space Strategy and Play Strategy	Executive 19 th April 2007	E227
Environmental Grants	Executive 27 th May 2004	E18

**NORTH WILTSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL (THE COUNCIL)
CONDITIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL GRANT OVER £500
FOR THE YEAR 1 APRIL 2007 TO 31 MARCH 2008**

1. Process

- 1.1 The award of grant shall be conditional on the approval of a detailed annual business plan or project report. This document will then be the basis for the delivery of performance outputs, and is required to take account of the priorities identified in the Countryside and Open Space Strategy, and of the wider policy priorities of the Council. The initial and subsequent year business plans shall form the basis for negotiated change and agreed new developments.
- 1.2 The business plan or project report should be submitted for approval by the Council in reasonable time for the financial period commencing the following 1st April.
- 1.3 The Council will review the application and ask for further information if this is deemed necessary.
- 1.4 Applicants will be notified of the decision, and the amount of funding being offered, if relevant, following a meeting of the Executive Committee, which will normally take place in May.
- 1.5 An application must be made annually for projects that are expected to run for more than one year.

2. Project Report/Business Plan

- 2.1 Included in the Business Plan/Project Report should be details of the operational programme for the financial year for which the grant is being requested and how it will address the following issues:
- 2.2 Match Funding
 - 2.2.1 It is essential that other sources of funding are secured as the Council will not fund the total cost of the project. Other sources of income could be from the Countryside Agency, English Nature, Landfill Operators, Lottery, local business and charities.
 - 2.2.2 Performance Indicator: the total funding from other sources secured for the project.
- 2.3 Partnerships
 - 2.3.1 It would be expected that a range of partners be engaged in the project whether these be statutory bodies, environmental groups, schools or the local community.
 - 2.3.2 Performance Indicator: the number of partners engaged.
- 2.4 Community Involvement
 - 2.4.1 To ensure ownership of schemes the local community should be involved where possible.
 - 2.4.2 Performance Indicator: the number of community groups and individuals engaged.
- 2.5 Biodiversity
 - 2.5.1 This should take the form of a link to the Wiltshire Biodiversity Plan or, show an increase in biodiversity of the project area (if suitable), for example the more sympathetic management of an open space.

- 2.5.2 Performance Indicator: species or habitat action plans addressed or the total area (ha) of land improved (this could take the form of advice).
- 2.6 Sustainability
 - 2.6 The project should show consideration to issues of sustainability, both in terms of measures to reduce the environmental impact of the scheme (e.g. use of public transport) and the future management of the project, or area.
 - 2.6.2 Performance Indicator: a statement of intent.
- 2.7 Skills/Training
 - 2.7.1 Is there potential within the project to improve the skills base of the people involved, for example, first aid training which could be of use in the wider community or traditional woodland skills.
 - 2.7.2 Performance Indicator: the number of training opportunities provided.
- 2.8 Crosscutting Themes
 - 2.8.1 The Council would be keen to see any grant given help towards as many cross-cutting themes as possible. Examples of cross-cutting themes are: social inclusion, deprivation, health and youth.
 - 2.8.2 Performance Indicator: the number of cross-cutting themes addressed.
- 2.9 Management and Financial Systems
 - 2.9.1 It would be expected that adequate Management and Financial systems be in place to ensure that the project is managed effectively and grant monies are spent according to the grant conditions.
- 2.10 Interpretation and implementation of the Council's co-ordinated Leisure Strategy and Countryside and Open Space Strategy
 - 2.10.1 Any application must fit within the framework of these two documents.
 - 2.10.2 Performance Criteria: the number of objectives within these two documents
- 2.11 Health and Safety procedures.
 - 2.11.1 The Council considers the safety of individuals to be extremely important and would wish to see organisations receiving a grant to demonstrate due attention given to health and safety matters.
 - 2.11.2 Performance Indicator: proof of a health and safety policy and risk assessment procedures.

3. **Financial Conditions**

- 3.1 The applicant must use the grant wholly and exclusively for the purposes agreed with the Council and identified within the Business Plan/Project Report.
- 3.2 The applicant shall maintain full written financial accounts backed by invoices, receipts and vouchers, detailing how the grant funding has been used for the purposes approved by the Council pursuant to condition 3.1. This information will be made available to the Council on reasonable request.
- 3.3 The applicant shall prepare and submit an annual report and complete set of audited accounts to the Council within six months of the end of its financial year.
- 3.4 Failure to comply with grant conditions may result in a reduction or removal of grant aid.

4. Accountability

- 4.1 The applicant will be required to invite a Council Member and/or Officer onto its Management Committee, Working or Steering Group with full voting rights, where applicable.
- 4.2 The applicant shall be required to attend update meetings with Council's officers every four months and any other meetings with officers/Members as may be arranged with reasonable notice.
- 4.4 The applicant shall make arrangements, to the reasonable satisfaction of the Council, for public access including Council's officers to Management Committee meetings and papers and for publicising open meetings as well as access to land purchased with financial help from the Council.
- 4.5 Applicants will produce a six-monthly update and a final report for the Council detailing progress against the Business Plan/Project Report.
- 4.6 In addition to its obligations pursuant to 4.2 above, the applicant shall if required by the Council attend ad hoc meetings with Council officers.
- 4.7 Prior to any meeting to be held pursuant with Conditions 4.2 or 4.5 above, the Council may require to be presented at that meeting a report and supporting written information on any matter relating to the obligations of the applicant pursuant to these conditions. If it does so the applicant shall ensure that such officers, as are reasonably competent to answer questions relating to the report, attend the meeting. A request for a report shall not be made by the Council less than 5 days before the date of the meeting unless the Council determines that the matter is of exceptional urgency.
- 4.8 The applicant shall diligently maintain all information and records (whether in paper, electronic or other forms) required to be kept by it pursuant to these conditions and shall make such information and records available to the Council with the exception of information covered by the Data Protection Act.
- 4.9 The applicant shall maintain detailed and comprehensive records in a form approved by the Council, of all expenditure of the grant aid the applicant's performance of its obligations under these conditions. This condition has effect in addition to and not in substitution for any other obligation to maintain records and/or information in these conditions.

5. Renewal of Grant

- 5.1 Renewal of grant shall be at the sole discretion of the Council; the remaining sub-conditions of this condition are for the mutual administrative convenience of the Council and the applicant. In the event that the latter wishes to apply for further grant funding and shall not be deemed to negate or detract from or in any other way pre-determine the exercise of the Council's discretion.
- 5.2 The Council reserves the right to amend, add to or delete any of these conditions at its sole discretion when considering future applications for annual grant.
- 5.3 No application for a renewal of grant funding shall be entertained by the Council unless it is made in respect of a period of one year and is submitted in accordance with grant condition 2.1, unless previously agreed.

- 5.4 Unless the Council otherwise determines, no approval of the application will be made without it having first approved (following such reasonable amendments that it may require) the draft business plan and operational programme. A final decision on the application shall be taken no later than two months prior to the expiry of the current grant. In any negotiation of the application the Council and the applicant shall use their reasonable endeavours to facilitate the achievement of these requirements.

Accepted and agreed on behalf of:

Accepted and agreed on behalf of
North Wiltshire District Council

Organisation

(Approved by Executive Committee –
Date))

Name

Name

Position

Position

Signature

Signature

Date

Date

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 its 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.