

Chichester District Council

CABINET

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Expenditure under the Planting Trees Outside Woodlands Project

1. Contacts

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2. Recommendation

2.1 That Cabinet delegates authority to the Director of Planning and Environment, following consultation with the Cabinet Member for the Environment and Chichester Contract Services for the release of grant funding from DEFRA for the following two projects:

- 2.1.1 £25,000 for the Agroforestry and Orchards Pilot; and**
- 2.1.2 £40,000 for the Hedgerow Tree Pilot**

3. Background

- 3.1 In September 2020, Chichester District Council was invited to join a DEFRA funded pilot project after one of the existing partners left the partnership. Chichester District Council is one of five local authorities included in the project nationwide and the only District or Borough Authority.
- 3.2 The purpose of the project is to trial different approaches to tree planting outside woodlands which has proved to be both difficult and not cost effective. DEFRA committed up to £400K to the District Council to lead on the Subsidised Tree Pilot, including funding a Project Officer for 2.5 years and also to replicate the pilots led by the other project partners.
- 3.3 It is developments within these other pilots that has led to the need for this Cabinet report to establish the process for releasing grant funding within the project, although the funding will be provided by DEFRA.

Agroforestry and Orchards Pilot

- 3.4 This pilot is being led by Shropshire Council. The concept for the pilot is twofold, firstly that landowners and farmers within the geographical areas participating in the pilot: Shropshire, Cornwall, Norfolk and Chichester would be able to apply for grant funding for establishing agroforestry projects on their land. Agroforestry is the

growing of trees around or amongst crops or pasture. Secondly, that landowners, community groups and parish councils would be able to apply for grant funding to establish community orchards. The District Council's role was to promote the funding locally but the scheme would be administered centrally by Shropshire Council. Unfortunately the Project Officer at Shropshire has now left the authority. With no Project Officer in place, it has been decided that the funding will be distributed to the individual partner authorities to grant fund projects in their areas. Therefore the administration of the grants will need to be undertaken by CDC and a decision-making mechanism established. The total budget allocated to the District Council is up to £25,000 for this financial year. Although Expressions of Interest have been received for the funding, we have not yet received any applications.

Hedgerow Tree Pilot

- 3.5 This pilot is being led by Cornwall Council. The project will trial different approaches for establishing hedgerow trees. Landowners have been approached who are willing to trial options on their land. Originally it was intended that the District Council would pay the contractors directly and have a Memorandum of Understanding with the landowners for them to manage the trees for the duration of the project (until March 2023). However following further consideration, it appears that it would be more straightforward for the landowners to appoint contractors and they would be reimbursed from the project budget as a grant for their expenditure. Three landowners have committed to take part in the pilot with a proposed expenditure of up to £40,000 for this financial year. Again, since the landowners will be reimbursed for their expenditure effectively as a grant, a suitable governance process will need to be established.

4. Outcomes to be Achieved

- 4.1 The main outcome to be achieved is to increase the numbers of trees planted in Chichester District with benefits for biodiversity and climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- 4.2 By agreeing the recommendations, the Council will be fulfilling its obligations as a partner of the Planting Trees Outside Woodlands Project and as set out in the Memorandum of Agreement between the District Council and DEFRA.
- 4.3 The main outcome for the whole Planting Trees Outside Woodlands Project is to influence future government policy and to develop new ways of expanding biosecure tree cover outside woodlands at reduced costs to meet increased ambition in England.

5. Proposal

- 5.1 This proposal is to establish the internal mechanism for distributing the DEFRA funded grant allocations under the Planting Trees Outside Woodlands Project.
- 5.2 It is proposed that the final decision on the allocations of grant funding to landowners, and other applicants through the Agroforestry and Orchards Pilot and the Hedgerow Pilot, be by the delegated authority of the Director of Planning and Environment, following consultation with the Cabinet Member for the Environment and Chichester Contract Services.

6. Alternatives Considered

- 6.1 The decisions could be made by the Grants and Concessions Panel. However this was considered too onerous on the basis that the funding through this project was different to the consideration of grants through the grants and concessions panel in a number of ways:
- 1) The origin of the grant funding is from DEFRA, as opposed to CDC funding. The external mechanism for distributing the funding has already been agreed and trial sites identified. Grant funding is the mechanism to reimburse landowners for expenditure undertaken, as opposed to paying contractors directly;
 - 2) The grant funding is not an open process, there is not an open call for sites as sites have been selected for their suitability for tree planting and as trial sites;
 - 3) DEFRA has specified the requirements for the identification of sites and distribution of funding and since the pilots are trials, these requirements do not completely align with those under the Grants and Concessions Scheme.

7. Resource and Legal Implications

- 7.1 For this financial year, the level of funding to be allocated through the relevant pilots is up to:

£25,000 – Agroforestry and Orchards Pilot

£40,000 – Hedgerow Tree Pilot

For the other pilots: Urban Tree Pilot and Subsidised Tree Pilot, funding is distributed not as grant funding but as direct payments to contractors and for the direct purchase of trees, sundries, fencing and works and therefore falls outside the scope of this report.

- 7.2 Staffing implications. The project can be accommodated within existing staff resources via the Tree Project Officer supported by the Environmental Coordinator.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 The financial implications of the Planting Trees Outside Woodlands Project have been discussed with Finance, Legal and the Procurement Teams. Recent discussions with the Community Engagement Manager identified the need for an internal mechanism for the distribution of funding from the project as grant funding.
- 8.2 The development of the pilot has been discussed regularly with the external project partners, including DEFRA, Natural England, The Tree Council and the other four local authority partners.

9. Community Impact and Corporate Risks

- 9.1 The main community impacts will be increased tree planting and increased partnership working within the district.
- 9.2 The main Corporate Risks without the mechanism as described, is that we do not fulfil our obligations on transparency and trust, although the funding has originated

from DEFRA who have agreed to the distribution of funds as described.

9.3 One of the main risks for the project is that the sites do not come forward as trial sites for tree planting and the funding is not allocated.

10. Other Implications

| | Yes | No |
|--|-----|----|
| Crime and Disorder | | X |
| Climate Change and Biodiversity Yes positive impacts for addressing climate change locally and for biodiversity | X | |
| Human Rights and Equality Impact Equality issues has been considered by the wider partnership, including ensuring that the funding for trees is accessible to all | X | |
| Safeguarding and Early Help | | X |
| General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) Appropriate handling of data collected is integral to the project | X | |
| Health and Wellbeing By supporting tree planting there should be minor but positive impacts on health and wellbeing | X | |

11. Appendices

11.1 None

12. Background Papers

12.1 None