

CABINET

17 December 2003

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT GRANT APPLICATIONS

REPORT OF REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

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RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB421 – Environmental Improvement Grant Applications 3 July 2002

PL3491 – Environmental Improvements – Grants Criteria and Guidance

PF1784 – Environmental Improvements in Rural Areas 28 June 1999

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report sets out current applications for environmental improvement grants for approval by Cabinet.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That grant commitments be made as follows

- 1 Forest of Bere, West Wood – up to £11,000 (one third) be committed to the project.
- 2 Saint Catherine's Hill Restoration Project – to agree the principle of up to £9,333 to be committed to the project.
- 3 West Meon Woodland Walk – up to £12,500 be committed to the project.
- 4 Swanmore Village Centre – £12,500 be committed to the project in 2004/05

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##### DETAIL:

#### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Four applications have been made for Environmental Improvement Grants in Rural Areas for amounts in excess of £10,000, which will require Cabinet approval.
- 1.2 Criteria for grant aid are set out in appendices 1 2 and 3.

#### 2 Applications

- 2.1 The grant applications received are as set out below.

#### 3 Forest of Bere – Improvement to Access at West Wood

- 3.1 West Wood is ancient woodland, owned and managed by the Forestry Commission who allow public access for recreation. This is a valuable public amenity for south Hampshire and is well used throughout the year. An application has been received from Forest Enterprise for a grant towards further improvements to pedestrian access. A previous grant of £2,800 was made in December 2001, which helped to fund a disabled access linking the woodland with the old Meon Valley Railway Line, now a popular bridle-way and cycle route also used by pedestrians.
- 3.2 This is a much larger project, creating two new all weather links to the existing forest trails, to create circular walks and another to link to the car park at Woodend. The construction is basically consolidated hoggins, on crushed concrete over a geotextile membrane. The value of these paths is that they cater for everyone, including the disabled and are suitable for wheelchairs and prams, enabling access whatever the weather. They help to prevent further erosion of the forest floor, which occurs when the existing paths are muddy and force visitors make detours across other areas. This results in the visual degradation of the area and the destruction of vegetation and wildlife habitat. This is a valuable area for recreation and a wide range of activities are catered for, including facilities for children's play.
- 3.3 The estimate for the project is £31,900 and a bid for approximately one third of this amount is sought. A commitment of one third of the cost up to £11,000 is recommended.

#### 4 Saint Catherine's Hill – Restoration Project

- 4.1 The importance of St Catherine's Hill is widely recognised, as is its special relationship with Winchester. Hampshire County Council has ambitious plans relating the old sewage works, which forms part of the hill and realise the potential of this land for public recreation.

- 4.2 The site was originally purchased by the City Council in the 1870s for the building of a sewage works and eventually became the responsibility of Southern Water. They are now preparing restoration plans to discharge, planning obligations, relating to their planning permission for the new works on the other side of the Morestead Road, constructed to accommodate the M3. Once Southern Water have discharged these obligations, which include decontamination and restoration of the land to a state suitable for grazing the County Council hope to acquire the site. They have, with other partners, have produced an Outline Restoration Plan describing the greater benefits that could be achieved at the site. This plan illustrates the need for a more detailed site investigation to prepare the land for public access. A bid was submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund in November 2002. A final decision is still awaited from the Lottery Commission.
- 4.3 The Outline Restoration Plan illustrates the benefits to be gained by a comprehensive partnership project, including:
- a) Enhanced setting and management of the Scheduled Ancient Monument and Site of Special Scientific Interest;
  - b) Enhancement and extension of the grassland habitats;
  - c) Extension of public access and of open space, and enhanced links to the surrounding footpath network including the South Downs Way;
  - d) Improved views of the hill from Winchester and the surrounding landscape;
  - e) Removing a visual eyesore of old sewage beds and rank vegetation from the key gateway to the AONB.
- 4.4 Hampshire County Council has written to Winchester City Council urging support for the restoration of this land for public benefit and inviting a closer working relationship. The Stage 1 application to the Heritage Lottery Funding included a request for a Project Development Grant. This will contribute a maximum of £50,000 to the total cost of £78,000. Hampshire County Council is contributing £16,000 and Winchester City Council is asked to consider an in principle commitment for the remaining £12,000 but it is recommended that £9,333, one third of the balance be committed for the year 2003/04.

## 5 West Meon

- 5.1 During the compiling of the West Meon Village Design Statement and as a result of a questionnaire, a small parcel of land in the heart of the village, was identified as having enormous potential to benefit the community by enhancing the land and creating a Circular Woodland Walk. The site is adjacent to the East Meon Road, the River Meon and the disused Meon Valley Railway Line,
- 5.2 The details of the project consist of :
- a) Create a circular walk by constructing a wooden bridge over the River Meon;
  - b) Replace damaged timber fencing with estate railings and gate;
  - c) Enhance the landscape by removing nettles and rank species;

- d) Encourage re-colonisation of water meadow flora and fauna;
- e) Improve the setting, boundaries and approach to the conservation area;
- f) Provide a new footpath
- g) Undertake hedgerow planting and management;
- h) Set up a conservation group to improve the environment and raise awareness of the unique landscape.

5.3 The total cost of the project is £32,000 but 30% of this is volunteer labour. Winchester City Council is being asked to contribute £12,555. Other grant aid is being sought.

## 6 Swanmore Village Centre

6.1 Following the preparation of their Village Design Statement, Swanmore Parish Council recognised the need to improve the village centre by undertaking visual improvements and creating a sense of identity, whilst improving facilities and safety

6.2 The Parish Council approached the City Council's Landscape Architect for advice. Public consultation has been undertaken and the Parish have been working in partnership with the Church, school and local retailers to ensure that the proposals will benefit everyone.

6.3 Meetings have also taken place with Hampshire County Council and other sources of grant aid are being explored. Plans have yet to be drawn up for costing but a Design Statement has been prepared and the following items have been identified as desirable

- a) resurfacing of the shops forecourt; (as this is private land, agreements with the owners will form part of the conditions)
- b) formation of steps/ramp to the forecourt at the junction corner;
- c) improvements to street furniture; boundary fencing, landscaping and forecourt fronting Swanmore Primary School;
- d) "gateway" features at the approach to the village centre;
- e) hard and soft landscape, seating, artwork and lighting in the core area;
- f) undergrounding of overhead cables in the core area.

6.4 This is a very ambitious project, but the preparation of a masterplan, will enable phased implementation. It could only be part funded by an Environmental Improvement Grant. Funding of £50,000 has now been secured from Hampshire County Council under the Country Towns Initiative. They are looking to the City Council to help implement the scheme, which will have a staff resource implication. Further capital funding may be forthcoming from Hampshire County Highways, if they agree to undertake highway/traffic calming works.

- 6.5 An in principle commitment of £12,500 is sought for the financial year (2004/05) and the Parish Council hope to match this. The total of £75,000 is considered to be the amount feasible to achieve the improvements, which will allow time for the preparation of plans, gaining permissions and the raising of other funds.

#### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

##### 7 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

- 7.1 The Council's Corporate Strategy commits the Council to working with the local communities to protect and conserve the local environment. These grants contribute towards this objective.

##### 8 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 8.1 Existing grants from the Environmental Improvement in Rural Areas budget, which is £50,000 per annum. No other commitments have been made within this financial year but other smaller bids totalling £20,825.56p are being considered. There is also an underspend from the previous four years of £33,000, which is still available.

#### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Applications with submitted plans, specifications and photographs.

#### APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: BASIC ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

APPENDIX 2: FUNDING CRITERIA

APPENDIX 3: TERMS AND CONDITIONS

## APPENDIX 1

**Basic Eligibility Criteria Common to all Grants for Environmental Improvement**

1. The proposals must result in the visual, aesthetic and/or ecological enhancement of external spaces in urban, village or countryside locations
2. The proposals must be appropriate to the location and character of the area and in line with the types of schemes set out below.
3. The project must be for the benefit of all or any of the following
  - a) public visual amenity (including public art)
  - b) historic/cultural/natural landscape features
  - c) wildlife habitat.
4. The site should normally –
  - a) be in public ownership or
  - b) be held in trust for public or wildlife benefit
  - c) provide free public access or visual amenity and contribute to the enjoyment of the local environment.
5. The project must have the support of local people and the permission of the landowner.
6. The proposals must support the aims of the Winchester City Council Strategic Plan or contribute to the adopted Planning and Conservation Policies of the Council and any supplementary planning guidance. (e.g.: Conservation Area Assessments)
7. The project must not form part of a profit making enterprise.
8. The project must be sustainable and have arrangements made for maintenance.

## APPENDIX 2

### **Funding Criteria**

1. The maximum sum for any one specific scheme should not exceed £12,500 (excluding any matching funding that may be available).
2. Small schemes (under £2,500) - applicants are required to contribute 50% in cash or kind.
3. Larger schemes (over £2,500) - applicants are required to contribute 50% of the first £2,500 plus 25% of the balance in cash or kind.
4. All applications, over £10,000 or where EIG criteria are not fully met, should be submitted to Cabinet, which is authorised to consider and determine such applications, having regard to the criteria set out above. (As amended at Cabinet on 03 July 2002.)
5. All applications up to £10,000 are to be dealt with under delegated powers by the Head of Development Services in consultation with .the Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Planning and a Local Member.

## APPENDIX 3

**Terms and Conditions**

1. Detailed plans, specifications and a timescale for the proposals are to be submitted to the Planning Department, for approval, prior to commencement and no changes should be made without the Department's agreement. Retrospective applications will not necessarily be funded.
2. A management plan must be submitted to the Planning Department for approval, where appropriate.
3. Estimated costs for the work should be submitted with the application.
4. Where funding from other sources is obtained, the Planning Department must be informed as they reserve the right to adjust the grant amount offered accordingly.
5. The grant is conditional on acquiring permissions or undertaking consultations, which are necessary. Winchester City Council will not be held responsible for failure to do this. e.g. Planning Permission, Felling Licenses, Highway Agreements, landowner's permission, access agreements, neighbour consultations, statutory undertakers services
6. The Landscape Section of Winchester City Council shall be notified of the work programme, so that any necessary inspections can be made.
7. The works shall be commenced within six months of the notification of the offer. Failure to commence the works, during this period, could result in the withdrawal of the grant offer, unless otherwise agreed by the City Council.
8. The works shall be completed to the satisfaction of the City Council within 12 months of commencement. Failure to do this works may result in the withdrawal of the offer unless otherwise agreed in writing by the City Council.
9. Payments will be made when the WCC Landscape Architect is satisfied that the project has been satisfactorily completed and upon submission of receipted invoices. Cheques will be made payable to the applicant. The City Council will not deal directly with payment of invoices from suppliers or contractors etc.
10. If the scheme is not maintained, or if the land is disposed of within 5 years, resulting in non-compliance with the determining criteria, the City Council reserves the right to demand repayment of the monies in full.
11. Any planting, which dies within 5 years, shall be replaced at the expense of the applicant.
12. Winchester City Council is not responsible for any problems encountered by the applicant with regard to contractual or financial obligations, insurance requirements, health and safety issues or other related matters. The applicant must accept full responsibility for all matters relating to the project for which grant funding is given.