

CABINET

7 MARCH 2007

PLANNING GRANTS 2007/08

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

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RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB1388: South Downs Joint Committee – Extension of Agreement, 17 January 2007

WTF86: Winchester Town Account Budget 2007/08, 16 January 2007

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report recommends the allocation of planning grants to organisations for specific projects in 2007/08.

Planning grants are made to enhance parts of the District which might not otherwise be undertaken. The total revenue budget available for the grants is £51,550.

The report also recommends Cabinet approval for two Environmental Improvement Grants under the Environmental Improvement Projects and Grants scheme.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That Cabinet approves the following planning grants be made in 2007/08:
 - a) Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre - £7,730
 - b) South Downs Joint Committee (formerly East Hampshire AONB) - £10,820
 - c) Hampshire Wildlife Trust (restoration of St. Faiths Meadow) - £7,000
 - d) Hampshire Wildlife Trust (wardening of Winnall Moors and St. Faith's) - £10,500
 - e) British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (for local environment projects) £5,500

- f) Itchen Navigation Project £10,000 (£10,000 per annum for five years, this being year two of a total contribution of £50,000)

2. That Cabinet approves the following Environmental Improvement Grants:

- a) £2,780 Wickham Parish Council
- b) £1,750 The Winchester & District Allotment Holders Society

CABINET7 MARCH 2007PLANNING GRANTS 2007/08REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT1 Introduction

- 1.1 The City Council awards planning grants to encourage organisations and local communities to instigate work of repair or enhancement of parts of the District which would not otherwise be undertaken.
- 1.2 A revenue budget of £51,550 exists in 2007/08 within the Landscape budget of the Planning Division. This has been increased over the 2006/07 amount to allow for an inflationary increase of 3% to be applied to those organisations where there is a Service Level Agreement that states the grant will be annually increased by inflation and has been applied to the grant to the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre and to the South Downs Joint Committee. The additional total amount of £500 needed to enable the inflationary increases has been vired from the Environmental Improvement Grants budget.
- 1.3 The Council as part of its Environmental Improvement Projects and Grants scheme also allocates funding to projects which will result in the visual, aesthetic and or ecological enhancement of external spaces in urban, village or countryside locations throughout the district.
- 1.4 A revenue budget of £16,500 for Environmental Improvement Grants exists within the Landscape budget of the Planning Division.

2. Proposed 2007/08 Planning Grants

- 2.1 It is proposed that the following organisations be allocated funding from the 2007/08 revenue budget for Planning Grants.

2.2 **Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC) - £7,730**

Winchester City Council is an HBIC partner and has a 3 year Service Level Agreement which is binding until 2009 and provides that the grant be annually increased by the current rate of inflation. The Centre provides a focus for the collection, management and dissemination of biological data relating to Hampshire, provides information for the production of Biodiversity Action Plans, gives guidance to local recorders and encourages the wider population to understand and appreciate the natural environment. It also provides necessary factual information to the City Council in connection with biological surveys and assessments for planning and hedgerow applications.

2.3 **South Downs Joint Committee - £10,820**

This Joint Committee comprises of all the local authorities that would be within the proposed South Downs National Park. It took over the staff and work of the former East Hampshire AONB Project which was a well established project. The Joint Committee continues to drive initiatives and provide advice for the conservation and enhancement of the landscape quality of both the East Hampshire and Sussex Downs the AONBs, their communities and visitors. The Joint Committee's officers work in close liaison with the various local authorities, providing an important link between the three counties subject to the ongoing National Park proposals. The City Council has recently supported in principle the extension of the agreement under

which the Committee was established beyond its original end date of 2008 (see report CAB1388, 13 January 2007). Cabinet also resolved that the grant at its current level would be adjusted for inflation for the duration of the extended period

2.4 Hampshire Wildlife Trust – Restoration of St Faith’s Meadow Site of Special Scientific Interest - £7,000

St Faith’s Meadow is part of the Itchen Valley SSSI, owned by Winchester City Council but had been inadequately managed and thus significantly deteriorated. The Planning Department funded HWT to produce an ecological survey and subsequently they were commissioned to prepare a Restoration and Management Plan, which will improve visual amenity and make a valuable contribution to our biodiversity targets.

In 2005 Cabinet approved funding of £7,000pa for the first 3 years of the plan, which HWT with their specialist skills are undertaking in partnership with WCC. Preliminary permissions have been obtained and specialist contractors are clearing under storey shrubs, poor small trees, self seeded saplings and dead wood. Local volunteers will be helping soon under the guidance of BTCV and the Trust.

A further grant for £5,000 for 2007/08 has been approved by the Winchester Town Forum (Report WTF86, 16 January 2007 refers.)

2.5 Hampshire Wildlife Trust (HWT) - Wardening of Winnall Moors, St Faith’s Meadow and St Catherine’s Hill - £10,500

Winnall Moors were wardened and managed by HWT for many years, including an area leased to them by WCC. That lease came to an end last year and it was not financially viable for HWT to continue to provide this service free of charge. This is an SSSI and as such there is a statutory requirement for the owner to manage the land in favourable condition. WCC have in previous years contributed to the management of St Catherine’s Hill but reluctantly cut this support two years ago. Last year it was considered prudent to consider funding HWT to provide a site warden for these three very special areas to ensure that they all continue to have good custodianship and improved wildlife habitat.

2.6 British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) – Local Environment Projects - £5,500

Under the Community Environment Project, BTCV have been responsible for enabling community volunteers to undertake local projects such as hedge laying, woodland management, pond restoration and tree planting. BTCV provide training, fund sourcing, and insurance cover and work with the groups to enable them to become self-sustaining. The funds invested in this project were significantly cut last year and there is no growth this year. The investment still yields a very valuable resource of volunteers who improve the environment, contribute to delivery of biodiversity targets, and there is a community benefit. The no growth situation threatens the post of the officer concerned. Previously HWT were also involved in a similar project but they worked in partnership with BTCV who provide all the training aspects.

2.7 Itchen Valley Navigation Project - £10,000

The main aim of the Itchen Navigation Heritage Trail project is to enhance and improve an internationally renowned chalk river system for the benefit of its wildlife, heritage, the community and visitors to the area.

The project was established as a partnership which includes Winchester City Council and by a project planning grant received from the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2004. The main Lottery bid submitted in September 2005 as a two stage project, was successful

and announced in March 2006. The outcome of Stage Two will be announced in March 2007.

3. Environmental Improvement Grants

3.1 **Wickham Parish Council - £2,780**

This project being led by the Wickham Parish Council aims to give forest access to all user groups all year round to ensure that everyone who visits the forest has a safe, enjoyable visit. The project will link two public rights of way, so that cars need to be used less, so that elderly and disabled people can use the trail. Specifically the grant will be spent on a trail surface constructed to a specification designed by the Forestry Commission. The total cost of the project is £11,780 with additional grants coming from the Hampshire County Council (£4,000) and the Awards for All Lottery (£5,000)

3.2 **The Winchester & District allotment Holders Society £1,750**

The Society has over a number of years been increasing the number of plots that it is able to let and in doing so has cleared many overgrown plots which were wildlife havens. In an attempt to recreate the lost wildlife habitat, about five years ago the Society embarked on a hedge planting programme which to complete it has applied for a grant of £1,750 under the Council's Environment Improvement scheme. The total cost to complete the project is £3,550 with £1,800 provided from the Society itself.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

4. CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

The giving of planning grants towards environment projects accord with the principles of safeguarding our high quality environment for the future by protecting and enhancing the bio diversity of the natural environment and to minimise the loss of green fields to development.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

The amount of £51,550 for planning grants for 2007/08 contained within this report can be met from the approved revenue budget for this heading. Both Environmental Improvement grants can be met from the revenue budget of £16,500 that exists for these types of grants.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Documents and background papers held in the Planning Control Division.

APPENDICES:

None.