

Item 8. Project development

1. Summary

This paper presents a brief update on project proposals currently in development.

2. Background

A key driver for project development is the forthcoming close in March 2019 of the Stiperstones & Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS). This will result in a reduction in activity overall and inevitably some loss of personnel and skills. Making some funding bids while staff from the LPS team are available to provide input is a high priority, and there is the possibility of creating further opportunities for employment for some of the LPS team.

National Grid 'Landscape Enhancement Initiative'

This potential funding from a national programme relates to around 2km of high voltage power lines on the south side of the Wrekin, which are the only National Grid lines in the Shropshire Hills AONB. AONB Partnerships and National Park authorities alone have the opportunity to bid to National Grid for funding for projects to mitigate the landscape impact of such power lines. Since they are too big to be hidden by tree planting, this can include landscape/biodiversity enhancements which lessen the impact e.g. by drawing the eye away from them. The scheme is now in year 2 of 6 years, and the first AONBs have recently had funding approved, after quite an onerous process. Project officer time can be funded for implementation. A site meeting has been held with one landowner, though not many opportunities for work were identified, as he has been in Countryside Stewardship and Higher Level Scheme. It is intended to submit an Expression of Interest by 31st August, to initiate dialogue with National Grid. The level of detail required for the full application is however significant, and it is likely that we will not submit this until the next application window next year.

Stepping Stones project

This proposed project is being led by National Trust, and after a couple of years of development work, partners are now in discussion with HLF about streams of funding and progressing to a full application. The project focuses on strengthening habitat networks in the Long Mynd – Stiperstones area. Phil is now on a small project management group, along with Natural England and Shropshire Wildlife Trust. Cath has recently been carrying out farmer engagement discussions on a paid basis, and has facilitated a number of joint sessions. The area has a significant overlap with the Stiperstones & Corndon LPS, and Stepping Stones is prominent in discussions about legacy projects from the LPS. Topic areas in which we are providing lead input to project development include farmer and community engagement, and landscape visioning. There are good connections of these to the AONB Management Plan review processes. We have undertaken to lead a local partnership group for the Long Mynd – Stiperstones area, not specifically for the Stepping Stones project, but helping to provide it with useful links into the wider community. This would also provide some valuable legacy arrangement at an area scale after the end of the LPS.

Proposed John Muir Award/ Young Rangers/training project

It is proposed to bid for an AONB-wide project rolling out the John Muir Award more widely, along with the Young Rangers scheme, and hopefully continuation of the traineeship scheme

currently run under the LPS. Joy, Cath and Phil are actively working on this, along with one or two external partners. The idea is to have a number of complementary elements working with young people in different ways. This may require a number of strands of funding, and creates some complexity.

Proposed Ancient Monuments volunteering project

This proposal brings together potential follow-on activity from the successful 'Helping Hillforts and Earthwork Castles' and 'Open Hills' projects within the LPS, and a recent approach from Historic England to see if we can harness volunteer activity in the AONB to help monitor Monuments which are 'At Risk'. This is likely to be a modest application to HLF (and other match funders), and should be fairly straightforward to put together. The project would ideally fund a project officer for 3 years. A second meeting was held with Historic England on 23rd August.

'Caering for Caradoc'

This is a proposed 'supporter giving' project (i.e. 'visitor giving' but also trying to involve local people), working jointly with the AONB Trust. Nigel is leading on scoping the delivery requirements (i.e. physical repair works to worn paths, plus wider management actions such as alternative routes). Local fund-raising through a specific appeal will then be initiated through the AONB Trust. The timing of doing practical works in relation to fund-raising is an issue to be resolved, and it is likely that some grant-type funding applications may also have to be made in order to raise sufficient funds. As well as addressing the issues of erosion on the ground in this location which are longstanding and getting worse, the project is seen as trialling a new way of working with the Trust on specific appeals, which may have wider application in future.

Road verges

We are one of a number of AONBs working with Plantlife UK on an imminent funding bid to the People's Postcode Lottery for a project on enhancing the biodiversity of road verges. Locally, this is picking up on current activity by Myndtown Combined Parish Council, funded by our Conservation Fund. Discussions are ongoing with Shropshire Council Highways, who are supportive, though there are some issues around regulations for safety training of any personnel working on verges. Mike is leading our input to this project.

Upper Teme opportunity mapping

Within this Financial Year Mike is undertaking some GIS-based opportunity mapping for habitat network enhancement in the Upper Teme catchment, funded by Natural England. There is the likelihood of this leading into further project work in this area, including practical implementation, working with the Woodland Trust and others. The Upper Teme catchment sits south of the Clun catchment and lies half in Wales. This activity also fits within a larger proposal for a 'Wild Marches' project, covering parts of Shropshire, Herefordshire and Powys, for which a bid has been made to the Arcadia fund by the Wildlife Trusts.

Resilient Heritage

Our potential reapplication to this fund for organisational development is on hold at present, but the possibility (floated at the AONB Conference by the HLF Chief Executive) of a number of

AONBs working together on a Resilient Heritage project, will be explored with NAAONB. This discussion has not started yet.

Upland Commons

The third application to HLF by the Foundation for Common Land for the upland commons project 'Our Common Cause' is due to be decided on in September.

Farms for AONBees

This project, using a computer model to work with farmers to encourage small changes in land management to benefit pollinators, is currently working in Cornwall AONB. The University of Exeter who provide the academic input are applying to NERC for funding to continue the project and roll it out to other AONBs. We are among five or six AONBs which have expressed an interest in this. If the funding is secured there will be training and support for applying the model in the Shropshire Hills, potentially at a small trial scale using existing staff resources, and/or perhaps seeking further funding for project officer time to do more. See <http://www.cornwall-aonb.gov.uk/blog/2017/6/5/world-environment-day-see-farms-for-aonbees-project-expand-to-bring-more-benefits-to-cornish-bees-and-farmers> and <https://vimeo.com/220305216>.

3. RECOMMENDATION:

The Transition Board is recommended to comment on the project proposals.

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