

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
MEDWAY VALLEY COUNTRYSIDE PARTNERSHIP PANEL

30 June 2008

Report of the Director of Planning, Transportation & Leisure Services

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non Key Decision

1 LANDSCAPE ENHANCEMENT GRANT

Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Landscape Enhancement Grant scheme and changes to the grant arrangements, which is funded by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 The Landscape Enhancement Grant is a small grant scheme available to landowners within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to assist towards the costs of landscape improvements. The funds are available to help towards the costs of labour and materials within the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership work area.
- 1.1.2 Funds are limited to £1,500 of grant aid per project and the improvements must tie into the targets for landscape improvement within the Kent Downs AONB. Projects should also include some public benefit.
- 1.1.3 The scheme is jointly funded by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and the landowner, and administered by the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership.

1.2 Legal Implications

- 1.2.1 There are no legal implications for this scheme.

1.3 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.3.1 The funding of the scheme by the Council was introduced in 2003 following the capital plan review process. The budget in 2003/04 was £10,000. No additional budget was provided for 2004/05, as the payments were able to be covered by slippage from the 2003/04 budget. The 2004/05 capital plan review allowed for a budget of £10,000 per annum but in the 2006/07 capital plan review the budget was reduced to £6,000 per annum from 2006/07 to 2010/11 to reflect demand at that time and the level of match funding from Natural England. During this time, 25per cent of the grant funding came from Tonbridge and Malling Borough

Council, 25 per cent the Kent Downs AONB Unit (from Natural England/Interreg), and 50 per cent from the landowner.

- 1.3.2 However, in 2007/08, the Kent Downs AONB Unit was unable to secure funding from Natural England and was therefore unable to provide funding for the Landscape Enhancement Grant. A report to Finance and Property Advisory Board on 11/07/2007 recommended that the Council increase its contribution to the funding to from 25 per cent to 50 per cent, but still within the limits of the existing budget of £6,000, during 2007/08 in order to maintain the existing level of grant aid and that the situation be reviewed in the following year in the light of Kent Downs AONB Unit's contribution.
- 1.3.3 Currently, funding for individual projects within the scheme is made up of 50 per cent from Tonbridge and Malling, and the remaining 50 per cent of costs are paid for by the landowner. The table below identifies the value of grants applied for per annum and the percentage spent of the annual budget for this project.

Year	Date	Payments	Budget	Percentage of budget spent
2007/08	31 March 2008	£2,045.47	£6,000	34%
2006/07	28 March 2007	£1,909.00	£6,000	42.3%
2005/06	11 May 2006 29 March 2006	£1,509.41 £3,775.00	£10,000	52.84%
2004/05	14 April 2005	£1,884.43	£7,500.00 carried forward from 2003/04	25%
2003/04	28 January 2004	£2,500.00	£10,000	25%

- 1.3.4 Medway Valley Countryside Partnership have submitted a bid to the Kent Downs AONB Interreg bid for funding, which if successful would allow Tonbridge and Malling to revert their contribution to the scheme back to the 25 per cent level, whilst retaining the £6,000 funding. A decision on the bid is expected on 26 June 2008. Caroline Drewett of the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership will be attending the meeting and should be able to answer any questions.
- 1.3.5 Although the table above illustrates that on average less than 50 per cent of the allocated budget for the scheme is utilised, the Interreg bid is based on an increased remit of the grant for both landscape enhancement and biodiversity projects. This widened scope may encourage greater uptake of the scheme as more projects may be viable for funding.

1.4 Risk Assessment

- 1.4.1 None.

1.5 Recommendations

- 1.5.1 It is **RECOMMENDED** that the Council support the widened remit of the Landscape Enhancement Grant to include both landscape and biodiversity projects.
- 1.5.2 It is also **RECOMMENDED** that, subject to the application for Interreg funding being successful, the Council make a contribution of 25 per cent to the funding of the Landscape Enhancement Grant scheme within the existing budget of £6,000.

Background papers:

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Nil

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