

EVENLODE VALLEY EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Summary: To present an update on the development on the “Green Ribbon of the Evenlode” project proposal.

Recommendation: That the report be noted.

Officer Ref: Simon Smith, Project Development and Business Planning Officer

Background

Progress to date

1. Officers and Board members have been investigating a potential area for another landscape based National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) bid since early in 2016. The Evenlode valley emerged as the target area and a workshop to identify the heritage, issues and projects was held with the Evenlode Catchment Partnership in April 2017. They reconsidered the outcomes of this workshop in May 2018 to agree an overarching theme to use for the project enquiry form.
2. The unifying theme for the project is the “the green ribbon”. The green ribbon is the river valley with its wet grasslands and woodlands running through the higher arable and dry limestone grassland landscape. The green ribbon has become a landscape in decline with a growing population that is becoming increasingly disconnected from it. There is an opportunity for a programme to restore the landscape through involving people before it is too late.
3. The match with both of the Board’s purposes and many of the policies in the AONB Management Plan is very strong. Projects will include;
 - Landowner advice according to a local menu of priorities
 - Hedgerow restoration and hedgerow trees, woodland restoration
 - Wildflower grassland restoration and management including field margins
 - Wet grassland and watermeadow restoration, reconnecting the river with its floodplain
 - Access improvements, interpretation and education
4. A project enquiry form was prepared in August 2018 but could not be submitted as the Heritage Lottery Fund had closed its programmes whilst it undertook a strategic review. The Evenlode Catchment Partnership considered this project enquiry form at its meeting in October 2018.
5. The Heritage Lottery Fund relaunched itself as the National Lottery Heritage Fund on the 30th of January with revised grant programmes and application processes. The original project enquiry form was rewritten to fit the new grant programme and expression of interest form. Following final comments at an Evenlode Catchment Partnership strategy day on the 4th April 2019 the expression of interest was submitted on the 5th April 2019 (APPENDIX A)

Next Steps

6. NLHF state that they aim to respond within 20 working days so we should hear by 3rd May 2019. It may be longer as they are no doubt inundated having only recently opened their programmes following a hiatus. All dates are tentative but a possible timeline could be a development stage application in May 2020. A full application in September 2021 and 4 years delivery starting in January 2022.
7. Subject to a positive reaction from the NLHF both the Board and the Evenlode Catchment Partnership will need to agree to proceed to a delivery phase application. This will require a much more rigorous look into project proposals and budgets along with developing a clear understanding of who will lead them, where they will occur and where the match funding will come from. The Evenlode Catchment Partnership is simultaneously developing a catchment strategy which will help inform this work.
8. The budget in the expression of interest is tentative and will certainly change if the project gets worked up in more detail. Based on similar projects a development stage of £200,000 and a delivery stage of £2 million are likely. At 20% these figures would include match funding of £40,000 and £400,000 respectively. One partner has already indicated that they would be willing to provide match funding and other sources may be identified through the Evenlode Catchment Partnership. If we get a positive response from NLHF this is one of the discussions that will inform any decision to proceed.
9. If the expression of interest is not well received by the NLHF the work to date will still be helpful to the Evenlode Catchment Partnership in developing their strategy and accompanying desirable projects list.

Supporting Paper(s):

Appendix 'A' - Green Ribbon EOI 05 April 2019 FINAL