

SOUTHERN COTSWOLDS LANDSCAPE ENHANCEMENT PROJECT

PROJECT PROPOSAL: EXECUTIVE BRIEFING

Summary: A project proposal that outlines plans to allocate £500,000 of Network Rail funding as capital grants for projects in the AONB, to compensate and mitigate for the adverse impacts of rail electrification works.

Recommendations: To note the project proposal.

Officer Ref: Scott Brown, Project Officer (01451 862005)

Summary of the Project

1. The Southern Cotswolds Landscape Enhancement Project will administer a £500,000 fund to support capital projects that mitigate and offset the adverse visual impacts of rail electrification works in the Cotswolds AONB between Old Sodbury (South Gloucestershire) and Alderton (Wiltshire).
2. A Project Officer has been appointed to devise and manage the project, which will run for two years, from January 2020 to January 2022. Their employment started on 13/01/2020 and they will be working 0.5FTE for the duration of the project, line-managed by the Planning and Landscape Officer.
3. The funding was provided by Network Rail (NR) as part of a legally-binding 'settlement agreement'. This represents the full and final settlement of NR's liability (in relation to works completed to-date) arising out of their statutory duty to have regard to the purpose of AONB designation.
4. All grants awarded must help finance capital projects that support the Cotswolds Conservation Board's statutory purpose:
 - a) To conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Cotswolds AONB
 - b) To increase the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Cotswolds AONB
5. Additionally, the 'settlement agreement' splits the funding into two sums, which are targeted at different outcomes:
 - a) £250,000 was allocated as the 'Cotswolds Project Sum', to fund compensation projects
 - b) £250,000 was allocated as the 'Cotswolds Mitigation Sum', to fund mitigation projects
6. After hosting and project management costs have been deducted, just under £410,000 remains available for project delivery. This will be administered via two grant programmes (£205,000 each), designed to account for and deliver the different outcomes required of each sum:
 - a) **Southern Cotswolds Enhancement Programme**
 - i. This will administer the 'Project Sum'

- ii. Landscape conservation and enhancement will be a priority, as will proximity to the railway, but any project that supports the Board's statutory purpose, within 40km of the railway, may be eligible for grant funding
- iii. Projects will be identified through a process of stakeholder engagement and an open call for projects.

b) Inner Rail Corridor Enhancement Programme

- i. This will administer the 'Mitigation Sum'.
- ii. The main focus of this programme will be on reducing the visual impact of the electrification works, for example through line-side planting, in the area directly affected (up to 3km from the railway).
- iii. Projects will be identified and developed through direct engagement with local communities, land managers and landowners.

7. The project will launch in spring 2020. Prior to this, further work is required to develop and finalise:

- c) Detailed funding criteria
- d) Communications and stakeholder engagement plan
- e) Processes for project assessment and allocation of grants
- f) Budget forecasts

Appendix A

1. Southern Cotswolds Landscape Enhancement Project: Project Proposal