

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet

13 September 2007

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REPORT ON GRANTS ADMINISTERED BY THE CONSERVATION & DESIGN SECTION

Purpose

1. This report is to advise Cabinet on the range of grants funded from the capital budget and currently administered on behalf of SCDC by the Conservation & Design Section. These grants may be sub-divided into those supporting the District's Built Heritage and those supporting the District's Natural Heritage.
 - (a) Built Heritage
 - (i) Historic Building Grants
 - (ii) War Memorials
 - (b) Natural Heritage
 - (i) Wildlife Enhancement Scheme
 - (ii) Parish Tree & Hedge Planting and Landscape Enhancement
 - (iii) Village Green Space Scheme

Background

2. Due to ongoing financial hardship and budget restrictions a review of both Community and Conservation Capital Grants has been requested. This paper has been prepared in response to that request and addresses those grants currently administered by the Conservation Section.

Considerations

Built Heritage Grants

- (a) Historic Building Grants
3. In the current (2007/08) financial year the Historic Building Grants has a capital budget of £39,300, which is a marginal increase from the 2006/7 budget of £38,100, but significantly down on the 2005/06 figure of £75,500 (ie the financial year before the authority was capped).
4. These discretionary grants are made to help offset the cost of using traditional materials or employing higher standards of craftsmanship in order to preserve the historic or architectural interest of a property. The level and scope of grant aid has had to be cut back over recent years, reflecting the reduction in overall funding available.
5. Grant aid is offered to dovecotes, windmills, barns and other agricultural buildings (which should be Listed or form a prominent feature within a Conservation Area), but are not available for conversions to residential use. Repairs to smaller, Parish owned structures such as pumps are also supported, and grants are offered to assist in the

cost of external repairs to churches or chapels (though again grant aid is not offered on conversion schemes). On private houses grant aid is made available for certain works to Listed or prominently located historic houses sited within Conservation Areas. Grant aid is primarily focused on thatching; supporting the reinstatement of thatching where it has been removed and replaced by corrugated sheeting, and for re-thatching or repairs to thatch on existing roofs. Some grant aid is also made available to assist in the sympathetic replacement of inappropriate windows and doors (where evidence is available as to the historic form of those windows and doors) and to preserve specific architectural features such as wall paintings. Grant aid is not normally extended to commercial premises, but the restoration of a traditional shop front in a prominent location within a Conservation Area may be considered.

6. Generally the grant aid offered by the Council under this programme is the only source of grant available to support these projects. The exception is works to ecclesiastical buildings, where English Heritage may also offer grants to support the cost of repairs on grade I and II* listed churches and chapels. However, in these cases their often small congregations are still faced with major fund raising tasks to bridge the gap between any grant offered by English Heritage and the full cost of the work, and a modest grant from SCDC can be crucial in enable repairs to proceed.
7. A schedule of the grants offered in 2006/07, and those offered to date in the current financial year, is set out in **Appendix A**. From this it can be seen that £53k of grant funding has resulted in over £1½ million expenditure on our historic buildings. Note, the grant offers made in 2006/07 exceeded the capital allocation of £38,100 as the Council is able to recover some grant monies where properties are sold within 3 years of a grant being paid and in other cases an offer is made (appearing as an expenditure commitment) but then is not taken up, so the money is re-allocated.

(b) War Memorial Grants

8. Over recent years a capital allocation of £2,000 per annum has been made available to support the repair and conservation of war memorials in the District. This work generally involves cleaning of stonework and re-cutting of weathered lettering. There are a very significant number of war memorials in the district (see the Gazetteer prepared by the Conservation and Design Section in 2005). The council's programme is in addition to a parallel grant programme operated by English Heritage (though the latter is only made available to free standing monuments that do not form any other function – ie the English Heritage programme would not support works to a stained glass window or a Memorial Hall).

Natural Heritage Grants

(a) Wildlife Enhancement Scheme

9. In the current financial year the Wildlife Enhancement Scheme (WES) has a capital budget of £10,200, which is a marginal increase from the £10,000 budget first allocated to the Scheme when it was originally started with in 2003/04.
10. The WES is a discretionary grant scheme (usually of up to 50%) used to support and facilitate wildlife conservation action, which ideally helps progress against Biodiversity Action Plan targets. Applications are invited from public bodies (i.e. parish councils, community groups and schools) or private individuals (such as landowners planting orchards, willow pollarding or companies creating wildlife areas). The Ecology Officer

assesses the value of all applications and will often have been closely involved in the development of a supported project.

11. The WES makes a positive contribution towards the promotion of biodiversity thus helping the Council contribute to sustainable development and show regard to biodiversity conservation, as required under the NERC Act 2006. Projects supported by WES are regularly featured in the South Cambs magazine.
12. In 2003/04 the average grant contribution was £909. The maximum grant was £2250 and the minimum was £75. The first year of the WES proved to be very successful with 11 projects supported. The funding was able to contribute towards projects totalling £49,592.68 in value. This represents a return of nearly £5 for every £1 of Council input through the scheme. For the year 2006/07 a return of 3:1 was generated. A schedule of the grants offered through the WES in 2006/07 is set out in **Appendix B**.
13. The WES continues to be a very effective means of progressing biodiversity conservation across the District, especially where previous County Council funded schemes (such as the Pond Restoration Scheme and Willow Pollarding Scheme) were terminated. The ability to make prompt assessments of a scheme's potential and an early offer of grant aid has also enabled projects to secure further grant support from other bodies (such as Awards for All, the Environment Agency and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biodiversity Partnership).

(b) Parish Tree and Hedgerow Planting and Landscape Enhancement

14. This grant programme has a capital budget of £14,100, and was set up for the current financial year by combining two previous grant programmes; The Parish Planting Initiative (which in 2006/07 had a capital budget of £3,700) and the Tree & Hedge Partnership (which in 2006/07 had a capital budget of £11,000).
15. The purpose of the Parish Planting Initiative was established to support Parish Council or Community led tree planting. The scheme is targeted on high profile sites, which contribute visually to the public realm (these may be in public or private ownership), or the planting a small number of extra-heavy standard scale trees to create an immediate landscape impact.
16. The Tree & Hedge Partnership was first developed jointly with the County Council, who originally administered the project and provided a designated staff resource. The project's purpose is to support planting, initiatives by agricultural landowners. The scheme was targeted on high profile sites, which have a contribution to the public realm, and planting of packs of 'whips' with a minimum of 100 metres length to restore hedgerows and landscape character. After the County withdrew from the Tree & Hedge Partnership a working partnership was established with the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) to continue the programme, with the project administration undertaken within the Conservation & Design section. Unfortunately, due to difficulties experienced by FWAG (and the agricultural community) in developing the new DEFRA Single Farm Payment scheme the tree & hedge pack scheme was not successful in stimulating projects.
17. In September 2006 the Conservation Advisory Group considered it important that SCDC retained the potential to stimulate and support the enhancement of the character of both the District's villages and the wider agricultural landscape. The Conservation & Design section had successfully absorbed the administration and financial management of the Tree & Hedge Partnership, but it was evident that

without dedicated staff resources to undertake site liaison work and help draft 'farm plans' it would not be possible to generate sufficient interest from the agricultural community to make a significant impact on the rural landscape. This had resulted in an underspend of the allocated capital resource in 2006/07. In contrast, the Parish Planting scheme has been successful in generating high profile and well maintained new tree planting on key, parish council managed sites in Coton, Teversham and Whittlesford. In 2005/06 the budget was marginally overspent, requiring virement from within the Conservation & Design budget. It was, therefore, considered appropriate to re-consider the focus of these two modest budgets, to ensure the maximum impact in terms of leverage of funding and landscape impact and it was decided to combine the two programmes to create a more flexible, single, tree and hedgerow planting budget for 2007/08, with newly defined criteria prioritising enhancement of the public realm within villages, but with the flexibility to facilitate planting on private agricultural land where this is accessible or will have a significant landscape impact.

(c) Village Green Space Scheme

18. In July 2003 the Conservation Advisory Group (CAG) recommended the then Conservation Portfolio Holder to authorise the establishment and funding of two pilot Village Green Space (VGS) schemes at Orwell and Elsworth. These were to be financed from the Heritage Initiative Fund, with a maximum grant support of 80%, limited to a maximum of £5,000 per village, and subject to the availability of resources. Furthermore, once the Village Green Space has been opened it would not normally receive any further funding from SCDC and future maintenance costs would have to be met by the local group. The local group could, however, continue to call on the professional advice of District Council officers if required.
19. The pilot schemes were considered successes and the CAG supported the promotion of a District Wide Village Green Space initiative in 2004/05. The development of such projects subsequently became a key target within the Community Strategy.
20. VGS should serve many purposes. They should make a valuable contribution to the protection and conservation of landscape, heritage and wildlife, as well as giving local people the opportunity to enhance the place in which they live or work. To qualify, the land must provide unrestricted, free and open access for all, and should be 'owned', managed and maintained by local people. The scheme encourages communities to identify and purchase suitable sites for this purpose.
21. Over the last four years schemes have been developed at Orwell, Elsworth and Foxton, with successful launch events generating active community involvement. More recently the parishes of Swavesey, Fen Ditton and Eltisley have enhanced otherwise redundant pieces of parish land. Hauxton PC is in the process of setting out improvements to its recreation ground and Rampton PC may undertake a similar project.

Options

22. Cabinet may wish to either:
 - (a) Continue the existing grant programmes as established for the current financial year; or
 - (b) Revise the grant programme by either:
 - (i) Cutting some aspects of the programme,
 - (ii) Cutting the amount of funding available to support the programme,

(iii) Retain the programme and funding, but instruct officers to focus the funding on those applications where alternative sources of grant aid are not available; or

(d) Cut the whole grant programme.

Implications

Financial	The Conservation grants programme for the current financial year has been identified from within the capital expenditure programme.
Legal	None
Staffing	There is adequate staffing in place to administer the current grant programme. The grants programme is seen as a very positive part of the Conservation and Design Section's work, providing enhanced job satisfaction.
Risk Management	Terminating the grant programme is likely to have a negative impact on both the built and natural environments of South Cambridgeshire.
Equal Opportunities	None

Consultations

23. This report has been prepared by officers in consultation with the Planning Services Portfolio Holder.

Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives

24. Affordable Homes	None
Customer Service	The ability to offer limited grant aid is seen as very positive by owners of Listed Buildings and others who use the services provided the Conservation and Design Section, who otherwise might view the service in a negative light, regarding the Listed Building, Conservation and TPO controls as over bureaucratic.
Northstowe and other growth areas	None
Quality, Accessible Services	Conservation grants enable the authority to provide an improved quality of service. The Village Green Space schemes achieves key actions in the Community Strategy and thereby contributes to the Conservation Service delivery of adopted performance indicator SP901
Village Life	Conservation grants assist in enhancing both the historic built environment and the natural environment, thereby contributing the quality of village life within South Cambridgeshire. The Village Green Space schemes enhance access to local green spaces and biodiversity, thus also improving the quality of village life.

Sustainability	The historic buildings grants programme encourages the use of traditional materials and techniques, while the natural heritage grants programmes encourage tree planting and other biodiversity enhancement initiatives, all of which contribute to a more sustainable environment (again contributing to SP901).
Partnership	All the Conservation grants programmes provide for a wide variety of partnership working; with individual house owners, Parishes, schools and other community groups.

Conclusions/Summary

25. The Conservation grants programme is long established and widely regarded as providing essential funding to enable a wide range of projects to come to fruition. It has been successful in attracting significant additional expenditure on both built and natural heritage in South Cambridgeshire. The grant programme also enables officers to influence the detailed aspects of supported projects, ensuring appropriate materials and traditional detailing are employed on built heritage projects, together with maximum biodiversity enhancement and the use of appropriate tree and hedgerow species in natural heritage projects. The total value of Conservation Grants have already been significantly cut in real terms since 2005/06.

Recommendation

26. For the reasons set out above, Cabinet is recommended to support the retention of the existing conservation grants programme as established for the current financial year.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Report to C&DAG "Village Green Space Scheme progress Update", Conservation & Design Manager, 17th January 2007.
 Report to C&DAG "Support for Parish Tree Planting and Landscape Enhancement – 2006/07 & 2007/08", Conservation & Design Manager 13th September 2006
 Report to CAG "Promotion of the wildlife Enhancement Scheme", Conservation Manager, 21st January 2004.

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