

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Conservation Advisory Group 21st April 2004
Leader & Conservation Portfolio Holder
AUTHOR/S: Conservation Manager

CONSERVATION AWARDS 2004/05 – NATURAL HERITAGE

Purpose

1. To seek members guidance on the establishment of Conservation Award scheme for 2004/05 focusing in the Natural Heritage, agree a programme for launch of the initiative and seek authority from the Conservation Portfolio Holder to allocate resources to support its implementation.

Effect on Corporate Objectives

2. The proposed Natural Heritage award scheme will contribute to meeting the Council's objectives by :
 - encouraging the best practice in the delivery of countryside access and enhancement services
 - recognising and celebrating schemes which enhance village life.
 - Contributing to meeting sustainability by enhancing biodiversity and landscape quality.
 - Facilitate partnership initiatives.
3. The proposed Natural Heritage award scheme will contribute to meeting the Council's annual priorities for 2004/05 by establishing best practice exemplars which can be used to create an effective approach to the development of the major growth sites.

Background

4. The Conservation Award scheme is designed to recognise, celebrate and encourage best practice which meets the Council's Conservation objectives. Given the breadth of the agenda (which includes both the built and natural heritage) the award scheme is proposed to alternate between years, to enable appropriate focus on the two main areas of achievement. Members will be aware that the *Conservation Award* scheme was re-launched in 2003/04 to help recognise positive efforts by parishes, developers and private individuals in securing the preservation, enhancement and management of both built heritage. The proposed Conservation Awards for 2004/05 will focus on the Natural heritage and will be a recognition of excellence in all aspects of conservation work relating to the natural environment.

Considerations

5. It is proposed to launch the Natural Heritage award scheme for 2004/05. Members views are invited on the appropriateness of the proposed assessment criteria and award categories. The following are considered to be the broad headings under which awards for Natural Heritage Conservation excellence might be considered :
 - (a) Achievement in landscape design and management. *Large scale schemes.*
 - (b) Achievement in woodland management. *Large scale schemes.*
 - (c) Achievement in enhancement of biodiversity – large scale.
 - (d) Achievement in enhancement of biodiversity - small scale.
 - (e) Achievement in countryside access and interpretation improvement.
6. It is proposed that all projects are assessed against their contribution towards meeting the Cambridgeshire Biodiversity Action Plan and the forthcoming South Cambridgeshire Local Biodiversity Policy, as well as the actions in the Community Strategy relating to countryside access improvements.
7. Awards would be given for schemes which would be able to clearly demonstrate fulfilment of specific actions and targets within the species and habitat plans. In addition consideration would also be given to;
 - Use of own initiative/origin of the project.
 - Site accessibility.
 - Co-ordination of resources.
 - After-use and follow-up work
 - Value for money
 - Diversity of habitats
 - Interest to the general public.
8. The following are considered fundamental to the success of the project.
 - High profile press launch (including article in South Cambs Magazine) describing the scheme and setting out the timetable.
 - Production of a well designed plaque or plate for erection on site (estimated cost £100 per plaque) as well as framed certificates (total cost £100).
 - Judging/shortlisting panel to comprise CAG members.
 - Site visits held late September to visit the recommended sites
 - Funding for an award ceremony. Afternoon?
9. Projects that have received grant should be eligible for consideration. Projects undertaken within the last five years should be considered within the scheme, as some is required for the larger schemes to mature or develop interest.

10. If members and the Portfolio Holder wish to proceed then it is proposed to have a press launch for the Natural Heritage award scheme early in June 2003 (after the elections on June 10th) with applications to be submitted by the end of August. Site visits could then take place in September and a award ceremony in October to coincide with future CAG meetings.

Options

11. The Conservation Advisory Group are asked to consider the following options :
- (a) To support the launch of the Natural Heritage Conservation Award scheme in 2004/05 specifying criteria for consideration/classification of entries.
- (b) To postpone development of the award scheme until a future date.

Financial Implications

11. Financial resources will be required to administer the scheme, produce an appropriate commemorative site plaque and to finance the award ceremony. The scheme would have to be managed in-house using existing resources. It is anticipated that the total cost of the award scheme will not exceed £1,500 and can be met from existing resources in the Conservation budget.

Legal Implications

12. None specific.

Staffing Implications

13. None specific.

Consultations

14. None specific

Conclusions/Summary

15. The award scheme would help promote the Council's Conservation objectives and encourage excellence. However, it is potentially a significant additional project and need to be properly resourced and planned, lessons on timing and promotion of the ceremony will be learnt from the 2003/04 awards.

Recommendations

16. It is recommended that the Conservation Advisory Group resolve to :
- (a) support the launch of the Natural Heritage Conservation Award scheme in 2004/05, specifying criteria for consideration/classification of entries for approval by the Conservation Portfolio Holder.

(b) advise that the Conservation Portfolio Holder authorises appropriate funding from the Conservation Portfolio budget to support the production of commemorative plaques and the funding of the award ceremony.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: None

Contact Officer: Nick Grimshaw - Conservation Manager
Telephone: (01223) 443180