

CARLISLE CITY COUNCIL

Report to:- **Carlisle City Council**

Date of Meeting:- **13th November 2012**

Agenda Item No:-

Public

Title:- **HIGHER LEVEL STEWARDSHIP GRANT OFFER**

Report of:- **The Director of Local Environment**

Report reference:- **LE 39/12**

Summary:-

This report details the offer of grant funding under the Higher Level Scheme (HLS) for agri-environmental payments, which was considered by the Executive on 29th October 2012 and by the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 25th October 2012.

Recommendations:

Council is asked to;

1. Approve acceptance of the Higher Level Scheme grant offer and approves acceptance of the conditions of grant in full.

A Culleton

Director of Local Environment

29 October 2012

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None



REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

PORTFOLIO AREA: ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT

Date of Meeting: 29th October 20112

Public

Key Decision: Yes

Recorded in Forward Plan:

Yes

Inside Policy Framework

Title: HIGHER LEVEL STEWARDSHIP GRANT

Report of: The Director of Local Environment

Report reference: LE30/12

Summary: The report details the offer of grant funding under the Higher Level Scheme (HLS) for agri-environmental payments. The qualifying sites are listed together with brief details of the work to be covered by the grant. The report also contains an explanation of the grant conditions and their potential impacts.

Recommendations:

1. That the Executive recommends acceptance of the Higher Level Scheme grant to Full Council, in accordance with the Council's Budget and Policy procedure, and accepts the conditions of grant in full.
2. The Executive delegates the Director of Local Environment to sign the agreement on behalf of Carlisle City Council.

Contact Officer: Angela Culleton

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Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND OPTIONS

- 1.1 As a major landowner in the Carlisle area, the City Council qualifies for agri-environmental grants in the same way as private farmers.
- 1.2 In the past the grants awarded to the Council have included Countryside Stewardship (for agricultural land) and Woodland Grant Scheme (for woodlands). These agreements are typically for a 10-year period and previous recipient sites include Talkin Tarn. With an annual payment of £22,800 the total for the 10 years of the agreement is £228,000 for both revenue and capital items.
- 1.3 Having come to the end of an Entry Level Scheme for Countryside Stewardship, the Council now qualifies for the Higher Level Scheme (HLS) under which the potential payments are increased. With assistance from Natural England's advisers, officers have been working for some months to enter as much of the City Council's land as possible into the scheme, in order to maximise the value of the grant.
- 1.4 To be eligible for the HLS (or any other agri-environmental grant) the land must be primarily agricultural in nature. This immediately rules out recreational parkland such as Bitts Park, Chances Park, Melbourne Park or Keenan Park. However Rickerby Park is eligible for the payment by virtue of the fact that it is grazed by livestock.
- 1.5 The complete list of sites for which HLS has been offered is:
- Rickerby Park; Talkin Tarn estate; Kingmoor Nature Reserve; Kingmoor Sidings; Cummersdale Holmes; Engine Lonning; River Eden woodlands (Etterby Scaur, Bitts Park); Petteril Valley; Knowefield Wood; Hadrian's Wood.
- 1.6 **Purpose of the Grant**
- The grant is given specifically to keep the land in good agricultural condition and favours environmentally-friendly management. Of course this is entirely in keeping with the Council's own objectives for the qualifying sites, so there is no conflict of interest with our own management plans.
- 1.7 **Conditions of the Grant**
- The general conditions of grant are set out at Appendix 1. With one exception these conditions again do not create any conflict of interest and do not create any problems for site managers in achieving the Council's objectives for the sites in

question. At Talkin Tarn, for example, the grant covers areas of grazed land that is already set back from the lakeside and is used only by walkers. Events taking place on the water (Regatta Day) or around the tea-room (Lakes Alive; Craft Fairs; Christmas grotto) would not be affected by the grant.

- 1.8 The Border Steam Fair at Rickerby Park would, however, be incompatible with the grant conditions. The presence of heavy machinery and vehicles has already had a visible impact on the park, with compaction of the soil leading to localised flooding and ponding. The presence of show followers camping on the site for 5-6 days, several hundred vehicles parked on the grass and the impact on public access are also problematic. The Steam Fair organiser has been advised of this.

1.9 **Levels of Payment**

Because the grant is calculated on a hectare basis and the areas are identified only by field registration numbers it is not straightforward to say how much of the grant is for any specific site. Rickerby Park's share would be at least £4,000 per annum, maybe as much as £8,000. The money will be used to maintain fences, trees, hedgerows and footpaths. The HLS grant encourages public access to the land, entirely in line with the Council's own objectives for a healthy, active population.

1.10 **Options**

- a. Do not accept the grant. This would mean the loss of significant revenue and capital funding for the maintenance of Council assets.
- b. Accept the grant in part. By withdrawing some holdings from the HLS scheme the Council would lose useful funding for the affected land. It would require a new agreement to be drafted by Natural England to cover the land remaining within the scheme and set back the maintenance work programmes.
- c. Accept the grant in whole. This benefits the Council to the tune of £22,800 per annum starting from the date of signing the agreement. Maintenance programmes can be planned with confidence and can start immediately.

2. CONSULTATION

2.1 Consultation to Date.

Ward Councillors; Stanwix Neighbourhood Forum; Border City Steam Fair

2.2 Consultation proposed.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 That the Executive recommends acceptance of the HLS grant to Full Council (in accordance with the Council's Budget and Policy procedure) and accepts the conditions of grant in full.

3.2 The Executive delegates the Director of Local Environment to sign the agreement on behalf of Carlisle City Council.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

To enable the Council's Green Spaces team to improve the management and maintenance of the sites listed within the report.

5. IMPLICATIONS

- Staffing/Resources – Positive impact, brings external resources into the Council
- Financial – If the proposal to accept the grant is accepted, then an additional £22,800 income per year for 10 years and would be used to provide additional maintenance on the sites covered by the grant
- Legal – The grant is subject to contractual terms and conditions and the Council must be satisfied that these can be complied with. The Council, as landowner, is able to enter into the Agreement as the Local Government Act 2000 (Section 2) provides that the Council has the power to do anything which it considers likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the environmental well-being of its area. The power may be used in relation or for the benefit of the whole or any part of the community or all or any persons present or resident in the Council's area. The power also enables the Council is able to enter into agreements or arrangements with any person.
- Corporate –
- Risk Management – Positive impact. Additional resources directed towards management of assets and visitor safety
- Environmental – Positive impact on the landscape and ecological quality of Council land holdings

- Crime and Disorder – Positive impact. Less likelihood of anti-social behaviour due to good management of land.
- Impact on Customers – Positive. Better environmental quality for all.
- Equality and Diversity – Positive. Better opportunities for access to open space.

Impact assessments

Does the change have an impact on the following?

Equality Impact Screening	Impact Yes/No?	Is the impact positive or negative?
Does the policy/service impact on the following?		
Age	No	
Disability	No	
Race	No	
Gender/ Transgender	No	
Sexual Orientation	No	
Religion or belief	No	
Human Rights	No	
Health inequalities	Yes	Positive
Rurality	Yes	Positive

If you consider there is either no impact or no negative impact, please give reasons:

Provides opportunities for healthy exercise.

Improves management of Council Land Holdings for agricultural purposes.

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If an equality Impact is necessary, please contact the P&P team.

PART 3**Higher Level Stewardship – Management of environmental features****General conditions on all Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement land**

On your HLS agreement land you must follow the general management conditions set out below, unless specifically stated otherwise in a subsequent section of this agreement. HLS agreement land is all land on which Higher Level Stewardship management prescriptions apply, including items within a Capital Works Plan.

- Do not apply lime
- On the conventional land that you manage: do not apply pesticides, except for the control of spear thistle, creeping thistle, curled dock, broad-leaved dock, common ragwort, nettles or other undesirable species named in your agreement. Herbicides may only be applied to these species by weedwiper or by spot treatment.
- Do not allow your agreement land to be levelled, infilled, used for the storage or dumping of materials or used by motor vehicles or machinery (except where necessary for the management of the land), if this is likely to cause long-term damage from rutting or compaction of the soil, or otherwise damage areas being managed under the scheme.
- Do not light fires (including burning brash or cuttings) where they could cause damage to features of archaeological or historic interest, or within ten metres of tree canopies or on any areas managed for their wildlife habitat interest. (This does not restrict your ability to manage heathland vegetation by controlled burning in compliance with the Heather and Grass Burning Regulations 1986 and accompanying Code).
- Do not allow your agreement land to be used for organised games or sports, rallies, camping or caravanning, shows or sales where this is likely to damage areas being managed for their wildlife habitat interest or features of archaeological or historic interest; where there is likely to cause excessive or unreasonable disturbance to wildlife being encouraged under your agreement; or where this would cause unreasonable restriction to Public Rights of Way or “access land” as designated under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.
- Do not carry out or permit metal detecting or archaeological fieldwork on any of the archaeological sites on your holding identified in your Farm Environment Plan, unless agreed with your Natural England adviser in writing. In some cases a derogation will also be required.