



ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Panel Report

Public

Date of Meeting: 25th October 2012

Title: HIGHER LEVEL OF STEWARDSHIP GRANT OFFER

Report of: The Director of Local Environment

Report reference: LE 36/12

Summary: The Council's successful performance at the Entry Level for Countryside Stewardship, means that the Council now qualifies for the Higher Level Scheme (HLS) under which the potential payments are increased. This is an excellent outcome for Carlisle's parks and open spaces and offers the opportunity to continue to maintain and improve public access to the land in the scheme.

Questions for / input required from Scrutiny: At the next Executive meeting on 29th October, the Executive is to consider the offer of increased payments in the Higher Level Scheme and the associated conditions that are required under this grant. It has been identified that a small number of activities would be restricted under the new scheme, including restrictions on the use of Rickerby Park for large scale events such as the Steam Fair. The Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the potential benefits of the scheme against the restrictions that the scheme would place on the use of the identified parks and open spaces.

Recommendations:

To consider the benefits of the scheme and any associated restrictions and make recommendations to the Executive on the acceptance of the Higher Level Stewardship grant.

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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 Scour, Bitts Park); Petteiril 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.

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		
Disability		
Race		
Gender/ Transgender		
Sexual Orientation		
Religion or belief		
Human Rights		
Health inequalities		
Rurality		

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

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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.